



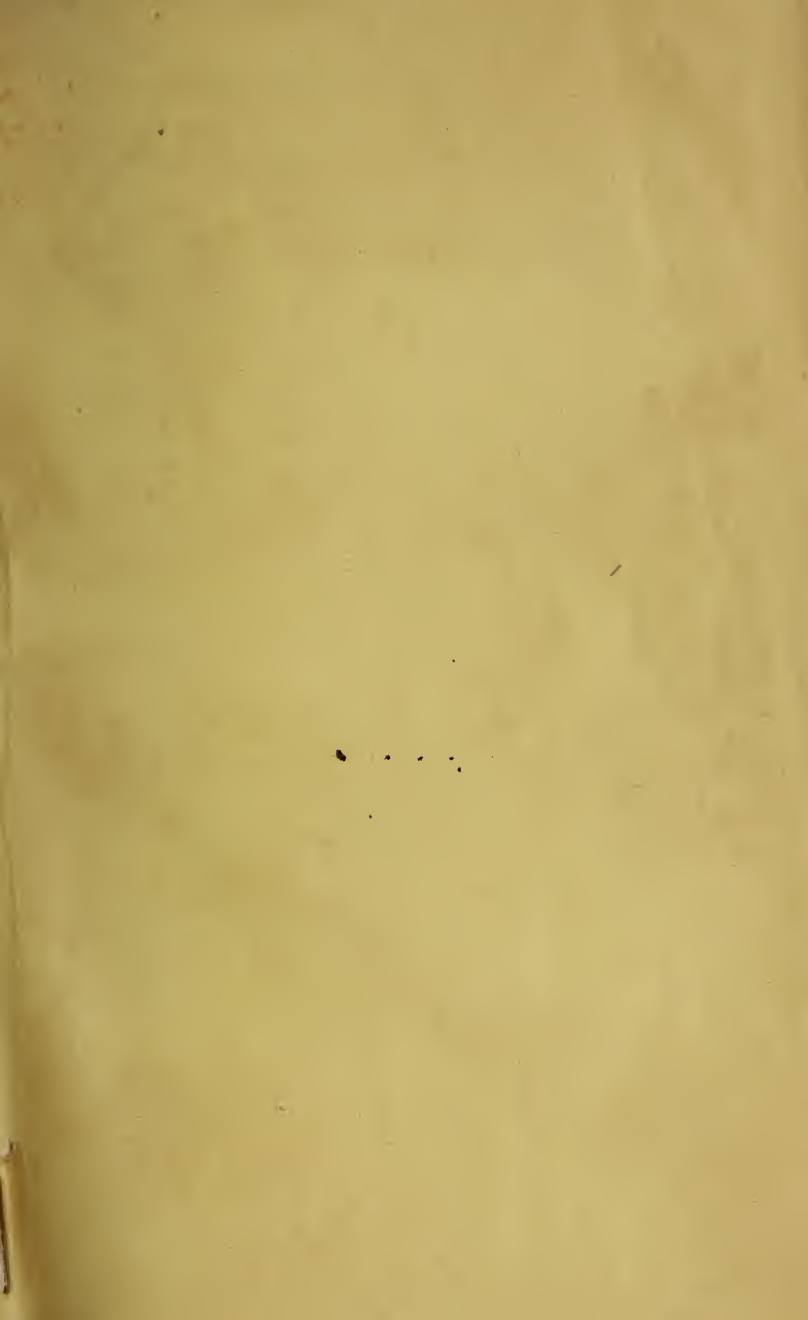
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“Why, Edward! I never knew that you had a cousin living.” (Page 117.)

ORA,

THE LOST WIFE.

BY
BELLA Z. SPENCER,

AUTHOR OF "TRIED AND TRUE," ETC.

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CONTENTS.

Chapter.	Page.
I. A NIGHT OF SORROW AND DESOLATION, . .	5
II. DR. CLIFTON'S FAMILY,	12
III. SITUATION OFFERED AND ACCEPTED, . . .	28
IV. AN EXCITING SCENE,	38
V. A WEB TO UNRAVEL,	48
VI. PAINFUL INTERVIEW,	55
VII. AN AMICABLE SETTLEMENT—ENDEAVORING TO SOLVE A MYSTERY,	64
VIII. SCENES OF TENDER INTEREST AND BEAUTY,	81
IX. A RIDDLE TO SOLVE,	89
X. "ORA'S" FLIGHT,	100
XI. CHANGE OF SCENE—EARLY YEARS, . . .	113
XII. CLOUDS RISING,	120
XIII. DARKER CLOUDS,	128
XIV. TEMPORARY SHELTER,	134
XV. EXCITEMENT AT DR. CLIFTON'S,	144
XVI. SHARP WORK,	155
XVII. IMPORTANT ERRAND,	160
XVIII. STRANGE WOMAN,	167

10 Feb 60 Morris
Rev. Mr. Engle 4 Jan 60 7-3-60

Chapter.	Page.
XIX. "ORA" MEREDITH JUSTIFIED AT LAST, .	185
XX. LONGING FOR REST,	196
XXI. SAD AFFLICTIONS,	211
XXII. CHANGING EVENTS IN A STRANGE LIFE, .	236
XXIII. PUZZLES AND MYSTERIES,	246
XXIV. MYSTERIES EXPLAINED,	256
XXV. SARATOGA,	270
XXVI. NEW PLANS AND PROJECTS,	277
XXVII. THE EXCURSION,	287
XXVIII. EXCURSION CONTINUED,	292
XXIX. COMPLICATED AFFAIRS,	299
XXX. FORGIVEN AT LAST,	305
XXXI. A NICE PIECE OF GOSSIP,	312
XXXII. LAST DAYS AT SARATOGA,	319
XXXIII. THE "RICHMOND BELLE,"	327
XXXIV. EDWARD PIERCELIE'S ARRIVAL,	341
XXXV. THE "END" DRAWING NEAR,	356
XXXVI. LAST MEETING,	365
XXXVII. CLOSING SCENES WITH SUNLIGHT, . . .	377

ORA, THE LOST WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

“Oh, my Father, be merciful!”

The agonized prayer was wailed out in the silence and gloom of a lonely chamber, and the fitful flashes of light from a grate where the half smothered blaze played over the black, smoking coals, revealed but partially the half prostrate form of a lady from whose lips the piteous lamentation had issued.

She was sitting upon the carpet, her arms crossed upon a chair, and her face buried upon them. A dress of deep black fitted closely about a slender form, and the loose sleeve falling away, gave the gleam of a snow white arm through the fitful light; but neck and shoulders were veiled in a mass of long dark hair that flowed over them and swept the floor. Heavy sobs and low quivering moans followed that audible cry for help and pity, and then the moans gradually ceased, and in a little while she wept softly, quietly, as if relief had come to an overburthened heart, and tears were gently washing away its stinging bitterness.

Half an hour passed, and the blaze burned brighter and more steadily. At last the bowed head was raised, and it was a strangely sweet face that was revealed, as with one tiny white hand the lady swept back the mass of rich hair that had fallen over it and become wet with that rain of agonized tears.

The brow was low, broad and full—a perfect type of intellectual beauty. The eyes large and shadowy—soft and lustrous now in the mist of tears still hanging upon the long lashes—in color like a violet, changing to black almost, with each phase of straying thought. The cheeks were round and full, yet very delicate in their contour—the lips full and arched like a bow. The chin delicate, but bearing that unmistakable stamp of firmness so plainly expressed in that feature of the face. There was a deep crimson burning now upon the cheeks, and the dark lines under the eyes spoke of suffering. But, with the traces of suffering upon her face, you see endurance and meekness in the expression of the beautiful mouth, and the brow and eyes are shadowed with a high and lofty purpose.

“Ah, me!” she sighed once more aloud, and with a mournful, thrilling softness in her voice. “It is hard, but it is *right*, I feel. Ah, Edward, I may never again look up proudly in your face and call you mine! That bright dream has passed like a golden flood of sunshine behind a cloud that may never scatter, and henceforth, unloved (would to God I could say *unloving*) I must meet life alone and unaided. No, not unaided,” she added, and a beautiful light broke over the face she slowly lifted upward,

“for Thou, oh my Father, who hast seen into the innermost depths of my heart and knoweth its struggles to follow after the right, will aid me through life, even unto death—though all others forsake me.”

The lady rose to her feet with another deep drawn sigh. She was not tall, but about medium size, with a form and movements of indescribable grace. A watch rested in her belt; a plain, but elegant brooch fastened the mourning collar about her white throat; and a plain circlet of gold banded the third finger of her left hand. Her whole appearance was that of an elegant, refined, and high-minded woman; struggling with grief, wrestling with pain, but slowly, surely rising above these influences, through love and Faith.

She took up the poker, stirred the now glowing coals until every corner of the chamber glowed with the bright light they sent out, and then gliding softly to the bed, she drew aside the heavy curtains and revealed the form of a child sleeping upon the pillow. It was a sweet and touching picture, and a mist once more gathered over the lady's eyes as she gazed down upon the child with its round, softly flushed cheek nestled in one dimpled hand, and the light shining rings of fair hair lying over the forehead. The tiny lips were slightly parted, and the little pearly teeth just peeped from beneath them; the breath came softly and regularly to the listening ear of the mother, and the long lashes sweeping the baby's cheeks, seemed serenely to veil the clear orbs which on opening you may find as deep, clear and beautiful as these were wont to be, which are now misty with

unshed tears. Mother and child are very like; only one is a fairer type, because in a miniature form of beauty.

Once more the lady sighed heavily, and gently dropped the curtains, gliding back to the fire, and dropping her forehead upon the mantle piece as she murmured:

“Only for her! only for her! it would be less hard! So young, so tender, so beautiful—oh God, could I *ever* bear to see her suffer. To grow up obscurely—perchance beneath the blighting shadow of suspicion—to come at last to *what?* *Misery?* Ah, Heavens, let me not think of it! For myself, I should not mind poverty and toil, but for her I shrink from it as from a pestilence. Have I done right, to take her from all that could brighten youth and life, to expose her, perhaps, to suffering, insult, everything, that the poor and helpless have to endure? Oh, my heart is torn with conflicting emotions—my brain racked with confusion! Father in heaven! I am weak and powerless! Help me!”

With clasped hands and bowed head she prayed with passionate fervor, wrestling with the terrible forms of evil that beset the pathway where she was advancing, pleading for light, for strength and guidance, till once more the shadow was lifted, and her face grew calm.

A sharp cry from the bed broke the silence that followed, and going to it, the lady took the child in her arms and sat down in a rocker which she drew up before the grate.

“My baby woke soon,” she said gently, as she

folded the long white night-dress over the dimpled feet. "Why can't little Ada sleep?"

The child's eyes were wide open and fixed on the glowing coals as if in deep thought. For a moment she sat unheeding, and then turned her face suddenly to her mother.

"Mamma!"

"Well, my darling."

"Ada see papa!" said the child, with trembling eagerness. The lady's cheeks, lips and brow grew ashen, but as if determined to hide the spasm that had struck a chill to her heart, from human eyes, she choked down the quivering gasp that rose in her throat, and asked softly:

"Ada saw papa? Where?"

The little creature's face lighted with an intelligence beyond her years, and closing the starry eyes she laid one soft, dimpled cheek in her hand, and the tip of a tiny finger over her forehead.

The lady smiled sadly.

"Ah, mamma understands. Her little girl dreamed she saw papa."

"Yes, Ada jeamed," nodded the child delighted at being so readily understood.

Then she added:

"Mamma, where is papa? Ada wants to see papa."

Again the lady's lips grew even more deathly in their hue, and her frame shook as if with an ague, but now she did not speak.

"Oh, mamma," the little one persisted, "Ada wants to go to papa! Take Ada back to papa!"

"Oh, my baby, how you torture me," moaned the mother, hiding her white face upon the child's shoulder. "Mamma *cannot* take you to papa!"

"But Ada wants to go back to papa. Do take Ada to papa," pleaded the little girl with a quivering lip.

"My child!" faltered the lady once more, "you do not know what you ask. Papa is far, far away—and oh, God! all unworthy the love of his pure little child! Oh, Edward! Edward! this is some of the fruits of your work! Not I alone must suffer, but the little one whose fond, pure love ought to have kept you true to us both. Oh, Heaven forgive you! Oh, God! help me to forgive him!"

She rose and placed the child in the chair, and with quickly beating heart, tightly locked hands and corrugated forehead, paced the floor back and forth in strong agitation. She was too weak in the heavy struggles she had endured, to yet rear an impenetrable barrier of firmness between herself and her sorrow—to establish a self-control.

Ada's eyes followed her mother's form in wonder and grief, forgetful of all save the scene before her. A great throb of pain swelled the little heart, and the lips parted with a low, sobbing cry, which brought the mother back to her side, and catching her to her bosom, she folded her there with remorseful tenderness, and strove as only a mother can to hush the sobs that quivered through the room with pitiful pathos.

"My baby! my precious baby! I had no right to make *you* feel what I suffer! Oh, I will try with

God's help, to shield you from the consequences of the step I have taken. Oh, surely, surely, you were never destined to drink the cup of sorrow from your infancy! God forbid! My baby! my baby! I will, I *must* shield you!"

Thus murmuring, with loving intensity, she kissed and caressed her, till the little girl grew quiet, and once more sat up in her mother's lap, her tearful eyes fixed in childish wonder upon her pale, troubled face.

But gradually the little orbs grew heavy and the curly head sank upon her bosom, while the lady sat still and mute. When slumber had completely wrapped the child's transient grief in oblivion, the mother softly laid her upon the pillow once more, and then with slow, thoughtful mien, paced back and forth through the chamber.

Heavily the hours dragged along. The rain beat against the window panes, and the wind surged drearily around the building with heavy, monotonous sound, but the pale, silent woman whose footfalls woke no echo on the thick carpet, heeded neither. Nor did she heed the loud clang of the town clock as it tolled the midnight hour. Wrapped in her own thoughts, she never paused in that slow, monotonous walk until the fire had died out of the grate, and the great city grew quiet, as if for a brief space of time its mighty heart had ceased its pulsations.

Then, with a cold shiver, she threw herself upon the bed beside the sleeping babe, and sank into a troubled slumber.

CHAPTER II.

"PAPA, Miss Durand leaves us to-day."

There was a shade of trouble in the clear brown eyes of Madeline Clifton as she communicated this little piece of information to her father, who had just taken his seat at the breakfast table with the morning papers beside him.

The old Doctor looked across at her with some surprise.

"Going to leave to-day, you say, my love. What's that for?"

Madeline sighed a little sadly, but smiled quietly as she returned:

"To get married. Surely you have not forgotten that I told you of the fact more than two weeks ago, and now the time has come for her to leave, and her place is still unsupplied."

"Bless my soul! I did not remember anything about it! Why didn't you remind me? Going to marry, eh! Well, well, I suppose we *must* give her up, as there is no help for it, seeing she *is* going to marry. When a woman fixes her mind upon *that* important event of her life, there's an end to their usefulness."

"I declare, I do not see what we are to do without her," returned the daughter seriously. "She seemed to understand us so well, that I am afraid we will never find her equal, and for the children's sake more than my own, I regret it."

"To be sure it's bad; but never mind, child, we'll soon get another, I hope just as good," said the Doctor cheerfully. "I ought to have attended to the matter before, but its not yet too late. Let's see."

He took up one of the papers and looked at the advertising columns. After running his eye down them for a few moments, he threw the paper aside and took up another. Here, after a moment's search, his eye rested thoughtfully.

"I'll see, I'll see," he muttered. "Perhaps she will suit."

"What is it, father?" asked Madeline, pouring out a second cup of coffee for him as he laid down the paper, thoughtful still.

"An advertisement for a situation as governess. It is a lady at the M—— House, who is in want of just such a situation as we have open. It remains to be seen if she is just such a person as we want. I will call there to-day."

So the subject was dismissed, and a lively conversation ensued, in which others of the family took a part.

It was a pleasant circle that had gathered round the table in the cheerful little breakfast room. Dr. Clifton himself was a hale, hearty man of fifty; very kind and benevolent in his nature—a thoughtful, tender, and generous friend, and a devoted father. The happiness and welfare of his children was above all other earthly considerations. Of these he had three; a son of twenty-five, who had adopted his father's profession with fair prospects of success; a daughter, Madeline, of nineteen, wise and thoughtful

beyond her years, and the pet of the household, Kate, who was about twelve, and as great a tease as ever lived, yet impulsively affectionate and generous in her nature. Other children he had had, but death had cut them off in their bloom, as it had also his gentle and noble-minded wife. Mrs. Clifton had died scarcely a year previous to the introduction of the family to our readers, and the blow was all the more severe because of the two little orphan girls whom they had adopted, and who, more than their own children, needed her tender care and careful training.

One of these was the only child of a niece of Mrs. Clifton's, who, in dying, begged that she would receive and rear her as her own. The other was the daughter of an Italian lady around whom the direst misfortunes seemed to accumulate until death relieved her of a burthen life could not sustain.

She had married in opposition to the will of her relatives, and with her proud young English husband, had sought a home in America, where they might establish more congenial relations. Scarcely a year passed, however, before a sudden misfortune swept away the little fortune Mr. Montes possessed, and shortly afterward he was stricken down with a fever and died, leaving his widow and infant almost utterly destitute.

Poverty, toil, and illness combined, bowed the naturally delicate, tenderly reared woman to the earth, and in her sorest distress, Doctor Clifton had been called in, and his great benevolent heart became interested in the helpless mother and child. Mrs. Clifton entered into his generous plans for their aid with a

spirit of humane love worthy to be classed with his, and they gave her a home where she was kindly cared for.

But day after day she drooped and faded away, and at last died broken-hearted. She had written to her relatives, informing them of her condition, but the cold reply they returned only served to hasten the termination of a wretched life, and her discarded, helpless orphan daughter, fell dependent upon the charity of her mother's benefactors. They did not demur or hesitate to accept the trust the wretched woman bequeathed them in dying, but with a loving tenderness rare and beautiful, Mrs. Clifton gathered the little one to her bosom and murmured:

"I accept this little babe in the spirit One has taught us who said, 'Inasmuch as you do it unto one of these little ones ye do it unto me.' My own will not be more tenderly cared for than this my little adopted daughter,—God helping me," and Doctor Clifton clasping the cold hand of the dying mother, said earnestly:

"My wife has spoken for both of us."

So the sufferer was comforted in her last moments by the divine love of two noble hearts.

Mary Staunton and Agnes Montes were nearly the same age, Agnes being but a little more than a year Mary's senior. So the three little girls ranging down from Kate, twelve, eleven, and ten, were no light responsibility; but Dr. Clifton declared it a great blessing, and he called them his jewels.

And this was the circle that gathered around the breakfast table on the morning in which we introduce them to the reader.

Dr. Clifton, Jr., had sent down an excuse, saying he would breakfast later, as he was busy, and Miss Durand had a slight headache, so that the little ones felt at liberty to break through the restraint their grave brother and governess' presence imposed upon them, and chattered like magpies when the Doctor had thrown aside his paper to enjoy his coffee and their society exclusively.

"Papa," said Kate, "won't you come and take us out riding with you this afternoon? We are not to have any lessons you know, and it will be so nice. Just see how brightly the sun is shining."

"Yes," put in Mary, "and see how the rain drops have frozen upon the trees. They look for all the world just like little diamonds jingling up and down on the twigs. Oh, how beautiful the woods must look!"

Madeline glanced out of the window through which the trees to which Mary alluded could be seen, flashing in magnificent beauty beneath their load of ice-jewels; and the Doctor with a genial smile upon the animated and expectant faces of his daughter and niece, turned a look upon Agnes who sat eating her breakfast quietly.

"What does my Aggie say?" he asked. "Does she want a holiday too, and a ride?"

Without lifting her great lustrous black eyes from her plate, the child answered gravely and respectfully:

"The holiday I shall have anyway, as Miss Durand is going. As for the ride, I am not anxious. I shall like either to go or stay as you please, sir."

"But I had rather see less indifference, my little

girl, and that you should enjoy it as other girls of your age enjoy such things."

There was no response, and Mr. Clifton sighed as he inwardly compared the grave, singular character of the Italian girl with those of the two laughing, happy children who were merrily and joyously discussing the enjoyment in store for them.

"Well, good bye, pets. I guess I'll have to give you all a ride this afternoon. Here, come kiss me, and I'm off."

Kate sprang up with a bound and caught him round the neck.

"Oh, you dear, dear, good papa! I won't tease you any more for a week!" and with a dozen impulsive kisses upon his bland, happy face, she sprang through the door and up the stairs like an antelope. Mary came next with loving and childlike grace clasping his neck as he stooped to kiss her, and she too went upstairs. Agnes rose quietly. There was no feeling in the large eyes she lifted to his; no loving pressure from the red lips she gravely held up for his caress. But with more tenderness than he had shown either of the others, he drew her for a moment to his bosom and softly pressed his lips to hers.

"Don't forget to see about the governess this morning the first thing, papa," Madeline requested as she came round to his side, happy like the others of his children, to receive the accustomed token of love at parting.

"My daughter, had you not better accompany me in my search?"

"I cannot, indeed, father. There are so many

things to look after to-day, I cannot be spared. I must not risk my reputation as housekeeper, you know," she added playfully.

"I can't see how you could in looking up a governess for your little sisters," said the Doctor in reply, but he added:

"It doesn't matter. I'll attend to the affair myself for you have enough to do anyway. Good morning, my love." He pressed a kiss upon her pure clear brow and was gone, while she turned to her duties with a quiet steadiness much at variance with her age. Her mother's death had wrought a wonderful change in her, developing her at once into a quiet, strong, almost self-reliant woman. No one would have dreamed she was once as wild and thoughtless as the heedless, impulsive Kate, whose rattlebrained disposition gave her gentle elder sister so much care; and yet before the great affliction which had laid a heavy hand upon a happy family, Madeline was even more wild than she.

Ah! how circumstances change or develop us.

Doctor Clifton drove directly to the M—— before entering upon his round of professional visits. He went into the Clerk's Office, examined the register, and found the name of Mrs. O. Meredith, St. Louis, Mo., and sent up his card.

There was a shade of earnest thought upon his brow as he sat waiting in the Ladies' Parlor for the lady he had called to see. His children's happiness was of too much moment to allow him to place a person over them whose influence could prove injurious, and he was aware of the difficulty he had to

meet in seeking for an instructress now from among total strangers. Even the best judges of human nature are sometimes deceived, notwithstanding evidences flattering or derogatory to a character which they may seek to understand. Who was this lady, and what would he find her? He had been induced to believe that he had found what he desired from the advertisement. And yet what could advertisements say to reveal the true character of a person? He sat lost in thought and speculation when the door opened and a servant announced:

"Mrs. Meredith," and at once retired.

Doctor Clifton rose, and the slender, dark-robed figure of the lady glided to meet him with a grace and quiet ease as pleasing to the fastidious eye of the old gentleman, as was the sweet pale face and clear soft voice that greeted him. With a dignified, yet gentle manner, she accepted the seat he placed for her, and motioned him to resume his own, saying:

"You have seen my advertisement?"

"Yes, Madam, I have in this morning's paper, and wishing to engage a person qualified as you claim to be, I have called to see you about it. I presume you are a widow," glancing at her black dress, "or more likely an orphan, for you look very young?"

"And suppose I should say you were correct in saying both," she answered with a sad smile.

"Then, Madam, I should say you are very unfortunate indeed. You are from St. Louis?"

"Yes, sir, directly."

"You have lived there?"

"No, sir, a different part of the world I have called

my home when prosperity and peace allowed me such a haven. But circumstances have changed all things in my life. I am alone—not helpless, I trust, but self-dependent. The past is full of pain—let me forget it. In the present I only seek to find the way to future advancement and usefulness.”

There was little that could be read in the calm, sad face before him, and the good old Doctor felt not a little puzzled and awkward in proceeding. But after a slight pause in which he vainly tried to read something of the feelings passing within the mind of the strangely fascinating woman before him, he said interrogatively:

“You of course bring references?”

She turned her large eyes upon him with a clear, full gaze, and answered frankly:

“No, sir, I do not.”

“Why, Madam! excuse me, but will you allow me to ask you how you expect to obtain a respectable situation without recommendations? Perhaps you have friends here? Or—”

“No, sir,” she interrupted, with gentle dignity. “I have no friends here, and I am not surprised at the astonishment your manner expresses at the step I have taken toward gaining a footing in a good family without references. But let me tell you frankly, sir, that my ability to perform any duties I may undertake, and my deportment must be my passport into any family where I may be so fortunate as to gain admittance. My greatest misfortune is my loneliness. None need fear me. I come from a good family, and till now have never known the need of self-depen-

dence. But as I said, fortunes change, and I am making my way forward now, blindly, perhaps, but earnestly, trustfully. If you will try me you will never have need to regret it. This is all I can say for myself."

Her manner was peculiarly earnest and frank, and the face was now lighted with a pure, truthful and innocent expression that won the interest of the man before her to an intense degree. But generous and benevolent as he was, Doctor Clifton was not one to work blindly where the welfare of his children was concerned, and he would at once have cut short the interview as useless, but for the strange interest that drew him toward the young and desolate being before him.

"But, Madam," he said, "do you not know you have undertaken an almost impossible thing? You bring no references—you tell us nothing of yourself to guide us to a knowledge of your character, and yet you ask us blindly to receive you into the bosom of our families and place our dear little ones in your hands? Pardon me," he continued kindly, seeing her face crimson painfully. "I do not speak to wound you, but to show you the position you have taken, for I really do not think you can comprehend the light in which you place yourself by so extraordinary a step. You will find your path full of thorns and difficulties at every turn, and be doomed at last to disappointment—perhaps worse. You will meet with unkindness and rebuff. I am not trying to discourage you in what you may deem right, believe me, Madam; but I say in all kindness that you cannot get along thus in a suspicious world."

One small hand had crept up over the crimson forehead while he was speaking, and now shaded the eyes from which the tears were dropping silently. The old gentleman looked at the slightly bowed figure with compassionate kindness, and slowly rising took a step toward the door.

She looked up then, and with a little quivering gesture, as if self-control was beyond further effort, said appealingly:

“Oh, sir, I do know the difficulties you mention, but for my child’s sake I would brave everything! I have a tender, delicate daughter for whom I must labor, and I can endure anything for her sake. Is there no hope of proving my personal worth—for oh, sir, I do not deserve scorn or blame—only pity, as there is a Father in Heaven who knows my heart this moment!”

“Poor woman! How little you know this world,” exclaimed the Doctor. “My child you are a very novice, and are not fit for that you would undertake. You are but a child at best, yourself, and have a little one you say to care for. Now come and sit down here and tell me frankly how you expect in your youth and beauty to meet a cold world, and hanging a vail between your life and it, ask it to accept you without suspicion and unkindness. Everything will go against you in your helplessness. And if you give no confidence, how can you make friends? There are those who will pity you because they see you alone and helpless, but they will not trust you, because they know nothing of you.”

There was such an air of fatherly kindness in his

manner as he seated himself in a chair near her, that her woman's heart went out to him as a little child's in love and confidence. But there was a feeling of shame that held her mute for several moments until the Doctor's words won from her lips that which she had in her heart to tell him.

"Come," he said, "tell me something about yourself, and if I can, I will help you, for I sincerely pity you, and would gladly aid you out of this unpleasant position. I cannot, however, even to spare your feelings, leave you blind to the exact extent of the error into which you have fallen."

"I will tell you," she said tremulously. "I feel your kindness, and see that I am almost helpless alone. I had never thought to breathe to mortal ear what I am going to tell you, but your age and kindness win my confidence. I ask your assistance, and after all, it is but right that you should know in whom you take an interest, painful as it is to me to tell you."

Then followed a brief sketch of her past life, recited sometimes in sadness, sometimes with tears and anguish. The Doctor listened with rapt attention, and when she had done, he took her hand respectfully.

"Lady you have done well to confide in me. I can and will befriend you, for I know you have spoken truthfully. My sympathy you have to an entire degree, for your sufferings have been severe. But now I will leave you, and this evening will call and speak with you further. Rest assured of my assistance, and try to be cheerful. Consider me your friend."

"Thank you!" murmured the lady through her tears. "And oh, believe me, sir, you will never find me ungrateful."

He pressed her hand kindly and took his leave, and then she went to her room and burying her face among the pillows of her couch, wept long and freely.

When evening came Doctor Clifton returned according to promise. He looked a little sober and thoughtful, but was kind and respectful in his manner. Mrs. Meredith met him with some restraint. She had not got over the painful struggle of the morning to reveal that which had cost her so much. But his manner soon dissipated it. There was but one thing that brought a trouble now to both.

"Mrs. Meredith, we will give you the situation we have if you find yourself competent. You are at liberty to try it, and if you fail to please us, we will find you something else; but what will you do with your child?"

"What will I do with my child?" she repeated. "Why sir, can I not have her with me?"

"But you cannot care for a little one and at the same time discharge school duties. Have you not thought of this before?"

"Yes, sir, but I always thought to have a nurse and keep her near me. I could not bear it otherwise."

"There I think you are mistaken. Do not undertake too much, lest you fail in all. I think your best plan would be to put her out to nurse. There is an old lady living in the same block with ourselves, who will take her if you are willing, and as I have known her for years, I can vouch for the tender care the child

will receive. I have thought of everything, and in my desire to aid you have looked into matters of most importance. What do you say to the proposition?"

Mrs. Meredith was silent for some moments. Her way seemed hard indeed, and she would have instantly rejected the idea of parting with her child, giving her pure, innocent charge into the hands of strangers; but now, plainer than ever before, she saw the difficulties of her way, and could not reject the only hand that offered her assistance, when another might never be offered in the same spirit of benevolent goodness. But *ought* she to let her child go from her sight? For her only, she sought to labor; this was her sole motive in life. She had expected difficulties, but she had never intended them to separate her from her child, where every hour she might not watch over and train her mind as only a mother can; and every impulse rose up against it.

"You must make some sacrifice for the sake of your child, Mrs. Meredith," said her benefactor, tired of the delay.

"I know it," she answered, "but sir, I *cannot* have her go out of my sight. She is all I have, and it will be the sole joy in my lonely life to rear her rightly—to preserve her spotless, with God's help, from the world. How can I answer for her future if I fail to plant in her the principles that are to sustain her through life. Doctor Clifton, a mother's eye should never leave her child, and I cannot let mine go from me."

"But it is better for both yourself and little one, and I would not advise it, did I not feel it so. Do

not act hastily. I offer you a situation on the strength of your confidence, which another would not give, and you will be placing more obstacles in your own way than you are aware of, if you reject it."

"Sir, I am fully aware of the truth you have spoken, but I feel it my duty to keep her with me. If you cannot allow me to take her with me under your roof, then I fear I must look further, and trust in God for aid, for I cannot, indeed I cannot give up my little child to strangers."

There was a spice of stubbornness, with all his goodness, in the old Doctor's composition, and when he was willing to go so far to aid one as he had made up his mind to do in regard to her, he did not like to have the sole proposition he had made thus decidedly rejected. For the mother's feeling he had due respect, but he did not relish the idea of a little child under his roof, where three children already claimed his care, and honestly believing it better that the child should be kept out of her mother's way, had in his own mind made it a sort of condition that she should send her out to nurse or give up the situation.

"Is this your final decision?" he asked a little coldly.

"What can I say more?" she returned with painful sadness in her tone.

"Ah life is indeed harder to sustain patiently than I thought! The world requires conditions which it places between the heart's of God's creatures and their dearest wishes, and I fear me those who reject them, will be called ungrateful and stubborn. But sir, to end this matter, I will say that I must not put

my little girl from my own care, and in doing my duty, however hard may be the path I shall have to tread and the difficulties to surmount, I shall look to God for help, and do believe that I shall not look in vain."

"You are blindly turning your face from one of His especial favors, if you could but see it," answered the Doctor somewhat impatiently. "I am anxious and ready to assist you, and you refuse it. I hope you will not have cause to regret the step you are taking, but I much fear you will. Remember this, however, and it is all that I can say now; you will find that my experience in the world has rendered me a correct judge of what is before you in your position, and when you too, through that experience, have gained the knowledge I have, and can make up your mind to accept my advice and assistance, I am still willing to befriend you. Till then, I leave you to experiment. I may not give you the situation you have open for you now," he added, "for it must be filled soon, and your rejection renders it necessary I should look further. There may be some other way, however."

He bowed and turned to go, leaving her standing near the middle of the room with a storm at heart beyond his keenest preception. She could not see her way clearly, or make a distinction between accepting or rejecting finally, for her child's sake. And during the struggle, he passed out and was gone.

"Oh, what have I done!" she moaned. "He *would* have been my friend, and I could have trusted him, but now I have sent him from me, perhaps feeling that all his kindly interest was wasted, and may

never again find one who will be the same friend to a lonely stranger he would have been! My Father in mercy guide me, for oh, indeed I am blind!"

Slowly she groped her way back to her chamber, in such an agony of mind as scarcely to be able to stand. Little Ada lay sobbing bitterly upon the bed, and a momentary forgetfulness of the sharp pain she endured, came with her endeavors to sooth her. But after a time when the child again slept, all her doubts fears and struggles came back, and as on the night previous, she paced her room in a wild conflict of feeling till the gray dawn crept in at the window, and she was compelled from exhaustion to lie down.



CHAPTER III.

A WEEK had passed away, and Mrs. Meredith was almost despairing. She could not go out and leave her little girl, and the answers to her advertisement had been discouraging. She found all that Doctor Clifton had warned her of, painfully true. Some were cold and reserved, leaving her at once after a few inquiries—some were quizzical and openly suspicious—which was an almost intolerable torture to a nature like hers. Knowing her own integrity, and purity of purpose, and feeling the great willingness at heart to bear all things for the sake of right, it was a sore trial to be looked upon as the world looked on her, and suspected of evil she might not combat without exposure of her most sacred feelings, and the past

which she was seeking so jealously to hide. More had to be borne than she had even dreamed, with her worst fears alive, and she began to doubt the propriety of the step she had taken in rejecting Doctor Clifton's conditions. Of the two alternatives, she found this the bitterest by far, for now crept in the terrible fear that her means would all be exhausted before she could gain a situation, and then what could she do with her child to depend on her? She would have to go forth into the world, and perhaps see the little creature for whom she was suffering all this pain and anxiety, deprived of even the commonest necessities of life, and be unable to supply her. The future seemed very dark and hopeless, — her strength was fast failing beneath the trial, and still she knew not what to do, or how to act. Care and loss of rest occasioned by her anxiety, was making terrible inroads on her health, and there was also a dread of personal illness added to her other troubles.

But in the midst of all this when she was almost ready to sink down helpless and despairing, Doctor Clifton came back. His kind heart relented when he thought of her distress and loneliness, and the memory of her sweet young face lived too vividly in his heart for him to abandon her mercilessly to the dangers of a world of which she had so little experience. After all it was but natural that she should cling to her child, and while he felt annoyed at the idea of bringing them both into his house, he admired the spirit of devoted love that had made her refuse to part with the little one; and during a week's time to reflect upon the matter, had allowed himself to decide

in her favor, provided she had been unsuccessful in making other arrangements. His mind had been sorely disturbed about her, and after making this decision, he felt much better pleased with himself than he had done since he left her. And while under the influence of the feeling, he went back to the hotel to inquire about her. She was still there, they informed him, and he sent up his card.

"Ah!" he said, as she appeared, looking worn and ill. "You have found it as I told you, I see by your face. I declare, you are nearly ill—your hand is burning with fever! How do you get on?"

"Badly," she answered drearily.

"It is even worse than you told me, and my strength is less to bear it than I thought, though my will is unchanged. Oh, I shall be ill, and then what *will* become of Ada?"

"Do not be alarmed," he returned pityingly regarding the shaking, suffering form of the woman. "I have thought the matter over, and have spoken with my daughter about you. If you wish to come, you may bring your child, and we will see how things can be arranged."

With a glad cry she caught his hand to her lips and pressed it as a little child might have done. His eyes filled instantly with tears and the sight of her grateful face brought a hearty self reproach.

"What a cruel old wretch I have been to let you suffer so!" he said wiping his face. "But come, I will take you home with me, and make up for it in future. Will you go with me now?"

"Willingly," she returned brokenly.

“Oh, sir, may Heaven bless you! I was almost ready to doubt God’s goodness, but you have proved that it is with me still, even in my weakness.”

She went up stairs to get her things, and under the influence of the generous impulses at work in his heart he went out to the office and paid her bill, ordered her baggage sent to his residence, and then awaited her in the Ladies’ Parlor.

“What a singular interest this woman excites in me,” he mused as he waited. “I don’t know why it is, but I suppose it’s her youth and helplessness. And then she is so grateful! It will be a pleasure to help the little thing. But bless me, she is a very child, and I almost think I am a fool to place her in such a position in my family. What will she do with those wild girls! But never mind, we’ll see.” And so dismissing the perplexities of the present from his mind, the Doctor met Mrs. Meredith when she came down, and conducted her to his carriage which was waiting, telling her that her baggage would be sent after them, and he would take her home at once.

A strange, fatherly sort of feeling crept into the good old gentleman’s heart as he seated the lady by his side and drove off. Then little Ada’s pure eyes looking straight to his with their innocent inquiring gaze, stirred a yearning tenderness he could not have understood, had he not been a father. With that same emotion of tenderness, he had a thousand times lifted his own children to his bosom, and now with an irresistible impulse, he bent his head to print a soft kiss on the upturned brow, and was rewarded by a bright, confiding smile that drew him strongly

toward the little innocent being. He now began to wonder that a feeling of repugnance had ever existed against the idea of receiving her in his home; but at the same time his heart was relenting and swelling with such tenderness his judgment told him that he was acting unwisely in placing a governess over his children who had a child of her own to look after and claim her time.

On the way, he spoke of the different members of his family in a manner which gave her some insight into their characters. Mrs. Meredith listened with great attention, and asked a number of questions which betrayed that interest to her employer, and which pleased him still more, since it spoke well for her in the duties that waited her in the future.

Madeline met them with a kind, easy grace that warmed her heart toward her at once, and Mrs. Meredith's first thought, as she looked into her sweet, quiet face was: "We shall be friends, at least." The children were shy and curious with the exception of Agnes, who after a slight nod when Dr. Clifton presented her to her future governess, quietly seated herself in a corner and seemed to pay no further attention. Mary, after a shy glance into the pale sweet face of the mother, carried off the child to a sofa where they soon made friends and began a regular game of romps; Kate was more than usually quiet.

After a moment, Madeline excused herself and went out, but soon returned with a girl who she said would show her up to her room. Ora, as we love to call our heroine, rose and taking Ada from Mary with a winning smile which warmed the little girl's heart,

went up stairs, whither in a short time Madeline followed. There was a look in the blue eyes of the stranger as she went out, that haunted the warm-hearted maiden, and her extreme youth and loneliness, touched her deeply. Her father had said nothing to her in regard to the lady's history except that she was of a good family, and that misfortune had thrown her upon her own exertions for support. This was enough. Beyond, everything was sacred to herself unless she chose to confide in her; but she was sorrowing, and needed sympathy, and at the risk of being thought intrusive, she would go up to her room.

The door stood very slightly ajar, and gently pushing it back, Madeline discovered Mrs. Meredith in a far corner of the room with her face buried in the sofa, while smothered sobs, and low broken murmurs stirred the silence of the chamber. Ada was clasped to her bosom with her right arm, her little wandering eyes brimming with tears, her lips quivering with distress. The picture was too touching for quiet contemplation. With a throbbing heart the gentle girl glided to her side and passed her arm about the slight form of the kneeling woman.

"Forgive me if I intrude," she said with a voice laden with loving sympathy, "but I cannot bear to see you looking so distressed and lonely. Be comforted. You shall not feel the need of friends here."

Ora lifted her head and fixed her brimming eyes on the sweet girlish face. There was a glad light in them that the tears could not hide, and her voice was broken and tremulous as she replied:

"You mistake me. I do not weep for distress,

but for thankfulness. My heart is so full at this unexpected blessing, that words are powerless to express what I feel. You do not know what it is to be alone and friendless, and to meet with disappointment till despair has well nigh paralyzed every faculty. Perhaps I am not fit for what I have undertaken; but God knoweth my will is good, my motives pure, and with His aid, I will try to merit your kindness. May He bless you and your kind father as you deserve. I had not hoped for such a haven of rest as this."

"I trust you may find it so, indeed," replied Madeline gently. "But even here you will doubtless find trials. We are not faultless, and you will remember that every picture has its light and shade. But we do hope you will find more of light than shadow here. We will try to make you happy if we can."

"Thank you—you are too good," murmured Ora thoroughly unnerved. "Do not think me altogether weak and babyish," she added after a short pause. "I have suffered so much anxiety lately, that this relief has entirely overcome me. I shall soon be myself again."

Just then a servant was heard in the hall with her trunks, and Ora hastily arose to her feet and went toward the glass to brush her hair which had fallen in disorder about her flushed face. Madeline went forward and saw the trunks brought and deposited in the room, and then coming back to where Ora stood, she said earnestly:

"You must try to feel at home and satisfied with us, and always look upon me as a friend. Can I do anything for you?"

“Nothing, thank you.”

Ora had again to struggle with her tears and did not dare trust herself to speak further. But she clasped the small white hand of the daughter as she had clasped the father's, and pressed a grateful kiss upon it. Madeline's eyes filled as she released it, and then hastened from the room lest she too should lose all self control. A pretty, tidy Irish girl came in soon, and said Dr. Clifton had sent her to take care of baby, and Ora unpacked her trunk to get at the little one's wardrobe. The girl took the white frock handed out, and dressed the child while the lady replaced the dress she wore, with an elegant black bombazine and crape collar, adding no ornaments than those she always wore.

Madeline came in herself when the tea bell rang, and the two ladies descended the stairs together.

Here the whole family now assembled, including Mr. Harry Clifton whose portrait we shall attempt to draw for the reader.

When Mrs. Meredith entered with Madeline, he was stretched at full length upon the sofa, his broad white forehead supported by a hand, white and delicate as a woman's, and on one finger of which sparkled a single diamond. His hair was very profuse and curling round his head in beautiful glossy rings. His brows were high, arched and very dark—his eyes in color like his sister's—a deep rich brown—changing to a cold, steely gray in moments of passion. His nose was slightly aquiline, rather prominent, and betrayed the high proud nature in the thin, swelling nostrils, and the fine lines of the mouth. The cheek

bones rose high and firm in their outline, the chin heavy, the lips full, the teeth glitteringly white and marvelously beautiful.

He lifted his eyes only for an instant to the face of the young governess as she entered and was presented by Dr. Clifton, with one keen, penetrating glance that cut her like a knife, and then seemed totally to ignore her presence.

He was evidently moody, and took his seat at the table in utter silence. The few advances made by his father to open a conversation, met with no response except merely a respectful acknowledgment without warmth. And knowing his son's peculiar moods, the old gentleman abandoned the effort.

Ora was very ill at ease. A strange nervous dread made her quiver till she almost spilled her tea in lifting the cup to her lips. But she exerted herself bravely to hide her constraint, and converse in an ordinary tone of voice, and with an easy, self-possessed manner with Madeline and her father.

Mary and Kate were each content to eat in silence Agnes being usually quiet, became no object of attention from taciturnity now. But two or three times during the meal, Harry Clifton, whose keen eyes took in everything without seeming to, discovered a strangely baleful light in the girl's black eyes, and her red lip curve with a scornful smile. For an instant his own face lighted with a half defined expression of intelligent interpretation of the child's thoughts—but in an instant afterward, he appeared absorbed in thought.

Before the others had done, he gravely rose and excusing himself passed from the room to his study.

No comments were made upon him in his absence, and Ora concluded the grave, almost severe silence he maintained, to be too natural to excite remark. As soon as she could, she too excused herself on the plea of weariness and attention to her little girl—and went to her room.

That night long after the family retired, she lay thinking of her new position, her duties, and painfully reviewing her abilities, to judge if she might fulfill them. A thousand misgivings tormented her, and she wondered if they would be kind and patient with her amid difficulties. Would Dr. Clifton remain her friend—would Madeline remain the kind, gentle, thoughtful being she had proved herself in the outset of her new career? Would the children ever learn to love her? Here again misgivings intruded upon her thoughts. Little fear was there for Mary Staunton. A look into the child's eyes proved her heart hers already, but she was not so sure of Kate and Agnes. And well she knew that everything depended upon the successful control of her pupils—and the best control, is ever through love. Could she but win their love and confidence she had no fears for the future. Otherwise, much might be dreaded.

Thus pondering, she at length fell asleep with her little daughter's bright head nestling upon her bosom.

CHAPTER IV.

A WEEK passed away ere Ora Meredith felt herself fairly installed in her new home, notwithstanding the kindness of its members. It took that length of time to wear away the strangeness and newness of things around her. Madeline's kindness and sympathy grew with her acquaintance of the young governess, and both Mary and Kate were in three days her declared friends. Agnes held aloof coldly, as she ever did from friends or strangers. Harry Clifton she had not seen more than two or three times, and the old gentleman, though much abroad, was almost as invisible at home except when at his meals. Then he was kind, genial and almost fatherly in his manner. His prepossession in her favor evidently increased, and things bade fair to run smoothly. What a sense of rest and peace crept into the weary woman's heart as she realized it. Once used to the regular routine of affairs, she was now beginning to feel the real sweetness of rest and security.

There was but one thing that really disturbed her, and prevented heart and mind from falling into that calm which generally follows excitement and unrest. This was a knowledge of Agnes' dislike. She had seized every opportunity to win the child to her, but beneath her cold reserve, lurked a stronger barrier in the shape of a growing hatred. She had studied her carefully, tried to win attention, but found her efforts fruitless in every respect. The little creature

was an enigma, and she had no key to solve it. Here was a seed for future trouble, and unless she could master it, and plant it in proper soil she felt that it would germinate for evil purposes.

One morning seated at her desk in the school-room, she observed that Agnes sat idly twirling the leaves of her book, her eyes fixed upon the branches of a tree that stood outside the window. For some time she allowed her to remain absorbed in her own fancies, and then spoke to her gently.

"Agnes you are not studying."

"I know it," without turning her head.

"Well, why not?"

"Because I do not choose to."

"Agnes!" Ora's voice spoke the pain she felt. She was not astonished. She knew that sooner or later there must be war between them. The time had come. One or the other must conquer.

The girl turned her brilliant eyes upon the pale sad face of her governess with an expression no child should ever wear. It was full of insolent scorn, hate and defiance.

"Come to me," said Ora quieting her tone to one of calm authority.

The girl did not heed or move, but kept her eyes fixed upon her face.

"Will you?"

"No."

"Agnes!"

A low laugh responded. Now the blue eyes of the governess grew dark, almost black with intense determination. They met the fiery black orbs of the

pupil in a steady gaze, and saw burning there all the stronger, more evil passions of her strange nature. She knew that her whole soul was roused against her, and she must subdue it, and spoke with the resolve thrilling through her voice.

"Agnes, you must obey me, or I must punish you. Come to me."

"I will not! you dare not touch me!" Ora rose and crossed the room quickly, but with a quiet, even step. The tumultuous feelings of pain and anger that rose in her heart she put down with a mighty effort, that she might bend every energy to one purpose with steady precision.

Agnes' eyes blazed, and she looked like a young tigress ready to spring upon its prey as her governess approached her; but there was something in the steady glance of the blue eyes bent on hers, that checked her in spite of herself.

"Do not touch me," she gasped passionately.

"I will call Mr. Clifton."

"What is all this?" spoke Harry Clifton at the door. His study adjoined the schoolroom, and the door being slightly ajar, the voices had attracted him. Quick as thought Agnes sprang past Ora's outstretched hand before it touched her shoulder, and stood by the young physician.

"Do not let that woman touch me! If she does, I shall murder her!"

Ora turned to face the intruder, and met a glance that exasperated her. There was no surprise in his face. Only a quiet, half triumphant smile softly creeping about his mouth, and yet the brilliant eyes

had a slight look of inquiry. She seemed to feel their meaning. They said. "Has this pale, delicate little woman enough of nerve and stamina in her to put down this young tornado of rebellion? Let us see."

"Mr. Clifton, have you come here to interfere with my authority, or support it?" she asked gazing straight into his eyes.

"Do you need support?" he asked without a change of expression.

"No sir," decidedly. "If you come not to interfere, leave me to accomplish my own purposes. Miss Montes rebels against my authority. I desire to, and must, establish it firmly for her sake and my own—for the sake of my other pupils—the duty I owe your family in the position I hold. Have you anything to say?"

There was a flash of feeling on his handsome face for one instant, but the nature of that feeling could not be determined, it faded so quickly. He answered by a question.

"Do you mean to punish her?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I have told her she must obey me, or I should have to punish her. I have passed my word. It cannot be broken."

"You are determined to use severe measures?"

"Mr. Clifton." Ora had to struggle hard to maintain her steadiness and quiet tone of voice. "I wish to know distinctly if you came here to interfere with me."

"Supposing I have, what then?" his tone was almost insolent.

"Then sir, I must say that you are very wrong in the course you are taking. If I cannot control my pupils entirely as I desire, how am I to gain over them a proper influence for good? Understand me, sir, I claim this as my domain. I must be mistress here or nothing. Allow me to judge of the nature of the offences I am called upon to punish, and to punish according to my judgment. This I *must* exact, or resign my place."

She had said more under the spur of exasperated feeling, than she knew to be prudent, but the words had gone forth and she would bravely abide the result. She felt herself right, and no power could shake her purpose. Her position must be firmly established or destroyed forever. She would stand her ground and endeavor to gain the field. He was regarding her with an unreadable expression, and stood silent for a moment after she had done speaking. Then he bowed frigidly, saying in cold, measured tones.

"Certainly, madam, I have no right to interfere with your authority here, and of course must allow that you know how to use it. May I ask, however, that you will fully explain the difficulty?"

Ora explained briefly, and with dignity. He listened almost respectfully to her clear statement, then with a second bow frigid as the first, turned upon his heel and quitted the room, saying simply:

"I leave her to your tender mercies."

She heard him enter his room, whistling as if

nothing had occurred. Her blood was boiling with indignation, until her cheeks were stained crimson with the tide, but her quiet, firm manner underwent no change, as she again faced the rebellious girl who had caused this commotion. The child's eyes still glared defiance, even though she had lost her champion. It would be hard to say which of the two were strung by a stronger purpose—the child or the woman. But Ora had gained one victory. She took courage for the second.

“Agnes, I am very sorry to punish you,” she began gently. “But you have disobeyed me, defied my authority—sought to enlist others in your favor against me, and, combining the whole, leave me to sum up a most serious offence. I have told you I should punish you, and I must do it, although it pains me deeply. Indeed the punishment is as severe for me, as I can possibly make it for you, for I had hoped better things of you. I have tried to make you love me, and through your love, to win you gently to your duties, helping you happily through them. You put it out of my power by ungrounded dislike. I cannot conceive why you should dislike or wish to wound me. When I think how much your friends will be pained at this, it pains me doubly; and when I remember that you are motherless, the pain increases till it becomes a sore and bitter trial to punish you. Yet I *must* do it, because you have disobeyed me, and I have *said* I would punish you.”

Agnes' blazing eyes were obscured by a mist. Had the earnest tones and sincere manner of her teacher reached a place in that strange, unchildlike

heart? She felt the supremacy of the will she had set herself up against, as her subdued manner indicated, but she was not conquered. She turned her back upon her, partly in defiance, partly to hide the tears she could not repress.

Ora took her hand and drew her resistingly toward her desk.

"Now Agnes, I shall banish you from the school-room for the remainder of the day. You cannot come down to dinner or tea, and I shall keep you locked in your room. Dr. Clifton and his daughter must be informed of your disgrace, and when you come out, you must make up your mind to confess your fault and sorrow for it to them and myself. This is a severe punishment my child, but you force me to inflict it. It is always easier and pleasanter to do right. Do you not see into what pain and sorrow you will cast every member of this family, by your willfulness? Surely, you will soon feel sorry to have wounded those who love you so much, and desire only your good."

Agnes did not reply, and Ora taking her arm, now led her unresistingly from the room. She was conquering. Only a few more judicious movements, and the victory would be complete.

When she reached the room, she did not thrust her in angrily, and leave her. But she repeated very sadly and feelingly.

"Agnes, I am very sorry you have forced me to punish you so severely. I can see into your heart, my child, and know what I am doing, but I cannot help it. Try to conquer the bad spirit that possesses

you and give rise to better and nobler feelings. Here is your book. You must study your lesson. I will come and hear it at noon."

She passed out and locked the door without more words, and Agnes scowled darkly after her. But her gentle, loving, sorrowful tones were still ringing in her ear, and gradually subduing the anger that had blazed up against her. For the first time in her life, a chord in her heart had been touched, and it vibrated to that touch with a strange thrill the child could not define. Love and tenderness she had had all her life, and had not heeded it because it was untempered by firmness and decision. Here she found a spirit softened with love, strengthened with purpose; and with the inherent sense which comprehends and admires the stronger and nobler powers of superior minds, this child of dark and bitter passions slowly began to feel the dawn of a better and higher nature.

The narration of the little episode of the morning, did cast a shadow over the family circle which Ora felt like a child. Madeline's gentle face grew sad and her eyes were full of tears. Dr. Clifton was grave, but he said promptly.

"You did right. We have been perhaps too conscientiously tender with Agnes because she was orphaned and dependent upon us. We do not wish her ever to feel her dependence. But there are elements in her nature that must either be eradicated or subdued, else I foresee trouble for her future."

"I am not sure that we have done her a kindness by allowing her willful nature full scope. We have

vainly tried to win her. We had no heart to punish her."

"Here is where serious mistakes are often made," observed Ora. "As much harm may be done by mistaken kindness as intentional wrong." But she forbore to add any more, and silence fell upon the party. In her recital she had not touched upon the part Harry Clifton had played in the affair, and he appeared utterly oblivious to the most remote knowledge, preserving unbroken silence throughout.

When Ora returned to the schoolroom, he pointed over his shoulder after her as she mounted the stairs, and said with a smile.

"We've caught a tartar, Mad. Whew! you should have seen her eyes flash!"

"Why, did you see it?" asked Madeline surprised.

"Yes, I went in on her at the outset, hearing the rumpus from my study. By George, a Queen might have envied her!" and he laughed, a low short laugh.

"How was it? She represented it rightly?" asked Madeline half disturbed.

"Perfectly."

He then explained what passed, word for word. "I am only surprised at her forbearance with me in her recital," he said in conclusion.

"Here we have more strength of character than I had supposed," said the Doctor. "It is a good omen, when we take into consideration her loving gentleness and sweetness of disposition. I think from present appearances, we may trust her."

"Dont be too hasty my good Father; Aggie is a little volcano, and Mrs. Meredith has not succeeded

in heaving the stone over the mouth of the crater
Wait till she's conquered."

"I wish she may have a bloodless victory said the Doctor." Madeline was silent.

"Well, there's one thing sure," added Harry more lightly than was his wont. "There is a queen here, and she is pretty sure to exclude trespassers from her domains. I for one have no further desire to risk my head, and leave her to reign in peace."

So saying, he took up his hat and went out.

Agnes lifted her eyes calmly to her teacher's face when she went up to hear her lessons, and handing her the book recited her task without hesitation or blunder. Ora contented herself with saying kindly: "That is well," and marking another lesson, left her to herself again.

At evening, when she went up, she found her with a hot, flushed face, and traces of tears on her cheeks. She had evidently been weeping bitterly, but she recited her lesson promptly as before, and then Ora sat down by her in the gathering shades and taking the child's hand, asked softly:

"Aggie, are you sorry for your fault?"

The answer was prompt and candid as the girl laid her cheek burning with blushes on her teacher's knee.

"Yes, very sorry."

Ora's heart throbbed. "Poor child" she thought. "What a struggle it must have cost her to bring herself to this." She stooped and kissed her, saying:

"There is the seal of your forgiveness. We will be friends in future, Aggie, not foes, and happiness will spring from love."

Ah, what a subtle power is that which springs from kindness. Without knowing it, Ora Meredith was slowly gathering up the stray threads of that fierce child's better nature, and winding them about herself in a bond that could break only with death. The inherent promptings of the child's nature lead her to despise those whom she could rule, to revere, and love the only one whom she had ever seen who had used a controlling power over her.

Much to the surprise of every member of the family, Agnes confessed her fault to Dr. Clifton and Madeline on the following morning, frankly, and expressed her sorrow. They had never before known her to yield to a will opposed to her own, and give way to better feelings. They could not understand it. So different—so unlike herself with that shy, yet frank manner, and the hot blushes mantling her cheek while she owned her error.

Was the teacher a magician, thus to transform her in a day?



CHAPTER V.

In the quiet and hush of the evening hour, Dr Clifton's family had strolled one after another into the library. Dark clouds drifted without, and an occasional patter of rain, made the fire look more bright and cheering within. Ora sat in a far corner, at the piano, Agnes at her side wrapt in a dreamy spell born of sad music. Dr. Clifton reposed upon a

lounge at ease, while Madeline sat looking listlessly into the grate, casting now and then a look of quiet interest upon the pale sweet face just outlined against the crimson wall paper. The singer's thoughts must have been busy with the past, there was such a low, lingering sweetness in her tones.

Gradually the wandering fingers steadied, and the voice which had given forth only brief snatches of song, now swelled out in a touching "Invocation."

"Tho' thine eyes be shaded, and thy cheek be faded—
Tho' the seal of death be on thy brow,
Still no fate can sever our true hearts forever,
Tell me love, where dwells thy spirit now?

"Does it rest in stillness, 'mid the gloomy chillness,
In the silent chambers of the tomb?
Does it wander darkling, 'mid the diamond sparkling,
In the deep mouthed caverned halls of gloom?

"Where the boundless ocean rolls in ceaseless motion,
Does it join the dwellers of the deep;
Do the fairy daughters of the crystal waters
Lull thee with the sound of streams to sleep?

"By the hopes that perished—by the love we cherished,
By the smile that ever answered mine—
Give, oh, give some token, ere my heart be broken,
That shall lead my weary soul to thine."

Madeline's tears were dropping silently on her black dress as the thrilling tones died away in a mournful refrain. No words can express the passionate sweetness of the voice whose power carried the words deep into the hearts of her hearers. Even Dr. Clifton's eyes swam in tears, and Agnes stood with her little hands clasped, and her bosom heaving with wild emotion when it was ended. Kate and Mary had paused in some light amusement they were about

to begin, and when the song was finished, stole softly from the room with shadows upon their young faces. It brought back the dead face of a lost mother on a tide of melting memories. The others thought only of her whose passionate heart had for a brief space of time thrown off the mask of serene composure to wail out a plea to some lost one for whom it longed. The spell was complete. It seemed almost sacrilege to breath a word which would dissipate the memory of those sad strains which still seemed to stir the air with their tremulous sweetness.

It was soon broken, however, by a voice which sounded hard and cynical as Harry came in by a side door and advanced toward the grate.

"'Pon my word, you all seem to love darkness, burrowing yourselves in this gloomy place like so many mice. What's the attraction?"

"Oh, brother, it always seems nice and cosy in here," replied Madeline pleasantly, hoping to soften the effect of his tones, "and then Mrs. Meredith was singing."

"So I perceived as I entered," he replied dryly. "By the way, madam, did it never occur to you to make a better use of your voice—on the stage, for instance? It would be a vast difference from the dull, plodding life of a governess."

His words were insulting, and Madeline spoke quickly, with a troubled look.

"Brother! how you talk! How can you be so rude? The stage, indeed!"

The last words were spoken in a lower tone, but

they caught Ora's ears, whose heart swelled gratefully. His voice had broken very painfully upon her under the influence of the memories that would rise in her heart, and his words stung her with a deep sense of injustice and insult; but she answered him in a voice as calm and unruffled as usual, with a slight tinge of coolness she could not repress.

"I do not doubt it would be vastly different as you say; but fortunately, even in misfortune and poverty, we are still at liberty to choose the mode of labor which provides us with bread. Mine, certainly, could not approach to anything like publicity."

"Why, do you fear the public?" he asked with a glance of cool affrontery.

Her brow flushed hotly, but she lifted her eyes to his face as she rose and came toward the grate with a steady gaze, and scornful lip, saying.

"No sir, I should not *fear* the public, but I despise it too much to make of myself a plaything for its amusement."

The entrance of a servant with cards prevented further remark on his part, and she turned aside with a throbbing heart. His wanton rudeness had moved her with unusual force. As she turned, she caught a full view of Madeline's face as she took the cards. There was a brilliant flush upon her cheek and a light in her eyes which spoke volumes as she repeated 'Guy Bartoni,' 'Charles Lafarge.' Papa, Guy has returned."

"Indeed! John, light the gas and show him in here. It is warm and pleasant in this room my dear, and he is no stranger," he added to Madeline whose

vivid color deepened as her father thus reposed his right to a familiar footing in the family. Neither of them noticed the half gasp of the governess at the name, nor the ashy paleness which overspread her features. Harry alone had caught the stifled sound of her quick drawn breath and noted the pallor of her face as he caught a slight glimpse of her profile, and a smile wreathed his lips, while his grey eyes flashed out a glance of triumph. In a moment she had glided unnoticed, except by him from the room.

"Ah! there is a web here, eh?" he half muttered under his breath. "What is it? Shall we get hold of the meshes by and by, and unravel it? We shall see."

The smile of satisfaction grew broad upon his face, lighting it to a look of generous cordiality as he smoothed and stroked his cheek softly with a soft white hand. The sister mistook it for pleasure at the new arrival, and looked grateful and happy.

A deadly faintness had seized Ora at the sound of the first name Madeline had spoken, and she hastened from the room to hide the mortal fear that struck to her heart like a blow. As she mounted the stairs, the gentlemen came out of the parlor and preceded by the servant, crossed the hall toward the library door.

Casting one look over the balustrade as she gained the landing, she saw distinctly, two faces strongly lighted by the hall lamp. One was dark and foreign, with heavy beard and large black eyes. The other was fair—almost boyish with dancing blue

eyes and a cherry mouth that seemed forever laughing amid its dimples. With a low moan, she pressed her hand over her heart and dragged herself slowly to her room where she threw herself upon her knees beside a chair and buried her face in the arms she threw over the cushion. It was an attitude she always assumed when in pain.

How long she remained thus, she could not tell; but at length she was roused by a knock at her door. Springing up, she demanded what was wanted in a voice which shook slightly in spite of her efforts to control it.

"Master Harry says, will you please come down and favor us with some music," returned John without.

"Tell your master that I am not well, and desire to be excused," she replied and as the servant retreated, she clasped both hands over her forehead with a gesture of indescribable pain.

"Oh, why does that man seek to torture me?" she groaned. "Insults, taunts and veiled sarcasm is all that he can give me. Oh, heaven grant that he did not observe me when I heard *his* name. Perhaps he did, and has sent for me to further his effort to understand why it should move me. But no, it was only to add another sting to the insult of to-night and I will not seem to take any further notice. *What* is it that makes him pursue me with hate? Oh, if he should discover that Guy Bartoni is known to me, what may not follow? I dare not think of it. I seem to be holding a cup in which sparkles all the wine of life there is left to me. Will his hand strike it down and leave me to die of thirst in a wilderness of

misery? Oh, why has he come here? How did he find that fair young dove whose heart he has won. I could see it by the flush on her cheek, and the light in her eye! Can he be her chosen lover? Oh, God forbid! The Vulture with the Dove—oh, Heaven is too merciful to mate her thus. I should die to see her wed him—sweet beautiful Madeline! Ah, what shall I do—how escape his eye? How shall I warn her? Dare I warn her at all? Oh, I am in a strait. Father, help me!”

She had been pacing the floor, and now she fell upon her knees. Thus it ever is, in our misery. We commune with ourselves until we see our helplessness, and then we turn to that power without which we can do nothing.

Hours passed before she sought her couch and endeavored to close her eyes in slumber.

It was late before the family left the library. Ora upon her knees, had heard the light patter of Madeline's feet as she passed her door; a few moments later she had heard the strangers mount the stairs also and enter chambers on the same floor with hers. Afterwards Dr. Clifton passed to his room. It was a half an hour later before Harry retired, and then as he went by her door, she fancied she heard a low laugh, which stilled the beatings of her heart and made her blood course through her veins like streams of ice. What could it mean? What mischief was brewing against her that should bring a laugh like that to his lips? Oh, were the bright days of peace and rest, and the hopes that sprang out of them, about to fade away into the dread chaos from which she so lately escaped!

CHAPTER VI.

A LIGHT streamed in upon Ora's face and woke her from the disturbed slumber into which she had fallen. She rose with a sickening sense of dread, as the memory of the preceding night came back to her; and endeavored to perform the duties of her simple toilette as usual.

But her head swam and her trembling fingers refused to perform their office. After several vain attempts, she realized that she was too ill to sit up, and went back again to her couch, feeling, even with all her suffering, a sense of relief when she thought that this would preclude the necessity of leaving her room during the day.

It was Sunday, and school duties being removed from her thought, left her free to nurse her illness and her troubles in the quiet and solitude of her own chamber

Half an hour passed, and all the rooms had given up their inmates. She heard the light, bouyant tread of the young housekeeper as she went by her door; afterwards those of the guests as they descended. Occasionally a girlish laugh reached her room, and she knew that Kate and Mary were enjoying their privileges of rising to breakfast with the guests, to the fullest extent. When the gentlemen went down, the noise suddenly ceased and then all appeared very quiet below.

Ada's eyes had been open nearly an hour and the nurse had succeeded in dressing and carrying her off while her mother yet slept, so that she was now in utter solitude.

A short time passed, and a servant came up to ask if she was coming down to breakfast. She replied negatively, and when he had gone, closed her eyes wearily and lay still.

Thought was very busy with past events, and both heart and brain felt the pressure of contending emotions. The glimpse of a familiar face and form had had the power to recall events she would have given much to forget; and now the quiet tide of her life was stirred again to a turbulent flow which might never again settle into the blessed calm which for a little while had made it seem so sweet.

Tears hung on the tremulous lashes that lay on the white cheeks, and the masses of brown hair scattered over the pillow, were damp with cold dews of suffering, when Madeline came in softly and stood over her. She had not heard the light tap on the door, nor her still lighter step as she entered; and did not even feel her presence till a soft, cool hand touched her forehead.

"Oh, you are ill," began Madeline in her kind, eager, earnest way. "Why did you not send down word, and let me come up to you at once?"

Ora looked up in her face, and smiled a sweet, patient smile.

"You are too good. I do not need anything but rest, and would never think of taking you from your guests."

She forced herself to speak indifferently. "My guests could have done without me, for a little while, at least," Madeline replied with a soft blush. Then she took some Cologne from the dressing table and sat down beside her, bathing her head with the utmost tenderness as she continued.

"Do you know that I came up here to tell you something? Miss Durand used to be my confidant and adviser in all household matters and I loved her very much; but I think I can speak to you more freely than I could have done with her. I am not like most young girls. I have no confidants out of my own home, and you know that Papa is not the most proper confidant in *all* things. So you see, being obliged to go to some one, I have come to force some sympathy from you."

A deeper glow rose to the fair cheeks, as, after the half hesitating and apologetic preface, she prepared to pour into Ora's ears, the story of her love and happiness.

The lips of her suffering listener, grew more ashen in their hue, but the blue eyes unclosed with a brave, steady gaze upon the blushing face, and she forced herself to listen calmly.

"You see it has been a long time since I have seen him—Guy, I mean—and I was very much surprised when he came last night. He had written us from the West, but his letter never reached us. Two years ago, he went across the Plains to California, and has just returned. We were betrothed long before my mother's death, but he never said anything to her or father about it particularly—I was so young.

I knew that my father liked him, though I fear poor mamma did not. She never seemed to have the confidence in him that papa did; but she never said anything to me about him. I was too young to think of marrying, and I begged him to wait until he returned, before much should be said in any way. He consented, and so it has stood. We corresponded as regularly as possible, and I always had delightful letters from him, dated from various places.

"I suppose he will want the marriage to take place now at an early day." She went on a little more hurriedly. "But I cannot bear the thought of leaving papa and the children. They would miss me. It is the only draw-back to my happiness. I know they can never get along without me, and it is folly to think of it for a moment. No one could take my place, and Guy has set his heart upon my going with him to a beautiful residence on the Hudson, some distance from town. I want your advice, dear Mrs. Meredith. What shall I do? I have not given Guy an opportunity to press his wishes, as yet, but if he should, what can I say to him in excuse for remaining with papa and the children?"

Ora's position was an extremely delicate and painful one, but she replied gently, though with an effort.

"The simple truth, dear Madeline. He cannot gainsay your wishes, surely, when he knows that they cannot do without you. No one else *can* fill your place, since your mother is gone, and I do not wonder at the feelings of perplexity you express. I do not like to advise upon so delicate a subject as this, but

since you ask me, I confess I cannot imagine how they could do without you at present."

"I am sure they could not," returned the young girl in a tone denoting deep thought. She had appeared lost in revery during Ora's speech, and seemed only to have caught the sense of the last words. At length she added, rousing herself and speaking positively!

"It is not to be thought of. I will tell Guy that he must wait longer. He may demur, but if I am not worth waiting for a while longer, I am not worth having. Still, I dread the task of telling him so."

She dropped her head thoughtfully upon one hand, and Ora surveyed the sober face pityingly. "Oh, Father," she thought, "surely thou wilt not let this pure, sweet girl be sacrificed by wedding one like *him*. Ah! help me to save her! I cannot bear to think of it! What *can* I do!"

A hasty summons from Kate took Madeline hurriedly from the room at this moment, and she did not see her again for several hours.

But she was not forgotten by the ever thoughtful girl. A nice cup of tea and some toast came up; and every little while a messenger was sent to know if she felt better.

All day Madeline's cheeks wore the rich color it had assumed during her little narrative of the morning, and her manner was slightly confused at times, as if nervous with the dread she had expressed. Harry Clifton's eyes shot roguish glances at her occasionally, which served only to increase her confusion, seeing which, he at last forbore, and left her in peace for the time being. The family all went to

church in the afternoon, accompanied by the two gentlemen, and after their return, household matters occupied her till after dinner, which served to relieve Madeline till evening, from the dreaded *tête-a tête*.

At length, however, Harry and the younger gentleman started off to the smoking room to enjoy their cigars, and Dr. Clifton betook himself to the Library. The little girls went up to the nursery to have a romp with Ada before bed time, and the two were left alone.

It was a moment longed for as much by one as dreaded by the other, for he went up to her instantly, caught her hand, then drew her close to his bosom where she hid her face, now dyed to the forehead, with crimson.

"Oh, Lina, how cruel you have been to me all this long day," he said reproachfully. "I have been dying to hold you here, where I have so longed, for two weary years, to fold you close, close to my heart; and yet you hold yourself aloof now that I have come back, and give me no opportunity to say a dozen words to you alone. Look up, darling, and tell me—do you love me now as when we parted? Are you still mine?"

"As ever, dear Guy," she lifted her face from his bosom and attempted gently to withdraw herself from his arms. "You do not deem me capable of change, I hope. Until I know you unworthy, you will ever hold the first place in my heart above all others."

"Then tell me why you have avoided me so scrupulously?" he questioned holding her fast and again drawing her within his embrace. "I have even tried

vainly to catch your glance to reassure me. Last night I fancied this sweet face, the face of an angel, it was so radiant with joy. To-day, however, I have been almost tempted to believe myself deceived, you were so cold and distant."

"Oh, no! not distant or cold, dear Guy! Only perplexed."

"And why perplexed?"

She looked up frankly, and with a confiding sweetness in her manner, beautiful to see, as she replied lowly.

"Because I remembered that in the last letter I ever received from you, you told me when you came back, it would be to claim me at once for your wife—"

"And so I shall," he interrupted. "I must have my bride now, without delay. Surely I have waited long enough. You do not mean to put me off again, do you Madeline?"

"I must, indeed I must."

His brow clouded, and an expression of pain swept over her face as she observed it.

"And why must you? Explain Madeline. You profess to love me, and I cannot understand what can come between us when this is so. Your father has long known of our attachment, and favors our union. With mutual love and his approval, what excuse can you bring?"

"My father's lonely helplessness—my sister's need of me. Guy, my mother is taken from us, you well know. In my poor way, I have tried hard to fill her place, and though I know how far short my efforts

have fallen I still know that they would miss me here, next to her. What *could* they do without me? Ah, Guy, I cannot leave them yet. My duty is here, and I must not selfishly pass over it, much as I would like to gratify you."

"Gratify me!" his tone was almost scornful in its bitterness, and Madeline looked at him, startled—almost affrighted. He put her from him and strode back and forth through the room.

"Oh," he said bitterly, "I had never expected *this*. After all this long waiting, I came back to you, my heart glowing with happiness at the thought of calling you mine. Then you come to me, and tell me still to wait. Plead a duty another might perform, and expect me to listen to it patiently!"

A low sob replied to this outburst, and he went quickly to the sofa where she had sank and covered her face with her hands to hide the tears she could not repress.

"Forgive me, Madeline, if I pain you; but I cannot bear the thought of again dragging through lonely, weary years without you. The disappointment of the moment made me forget myself. I did not mean to wound you, darling. Tell me that you did not mean it—that you were only trying me, to test my love."

"Ah, no Guy! I am no trifler; you well know I have faith in your love, and would gladly be your wife to-morrow, could I leave my poor father, and the darling children my dying mother confided to my care. It pains me to disappoint you. Still I must do it. I have thought a great deal about it,

and the more I think, the more I feel the sense of duty which binds me here. If I could stay with them after our marriage, it would be different, but that, you have always given me to understand, I must not expect to do. Therefore the only way left me, is to say 'wait until I can leave then safely.' I cannot do it now."

The interview was long, and very painful to the devoted girl whose love and duty were thus divided. The lover became more earnest as she persisted in her refusal. He was angry and persuasive by turns, but she remained firm, and they parted in mutual trouble. Madeline carried an aching heart and tear wet face to her pillow that night. Guy was angry and impatient. He was both impulsive and selfish, and could ill brook opposition to his wishes. In Madeline he had expected to find a pliant subject, and her firmness surprised and galled him. He left her a wild, gay and very loving girl. He came back to find her a strong, firm woman, with a depth of thought and purpose beyond his most extravagant ideas. He did not like the change. Women, according to his views, ought never to have a wish, except through their husbands, and he wanted his wife to be his slave, not his companion on the footing of an equal, with wishes and opinions independent of his own.

Strange as it may seem, on reflection, the world claims a very large class of men with the same ideas—much too large for the happiness of that portion of the opposite sex, who are in every way fitted to stand on an equal footing, morally and in an intellectual sense of the word.

CHAPTER VII.

MONDAY morning found Mrs. Meredith at her post, but she looked pale and ill, so that her excuses for not going below stairs, were readily accepted by all the family. Unsuspecting, none except the ever watchful Harry, could see a deeper motive in her withdrawal, than to avoid meeting strangers while feeling too ill to mix with society. But the one hasty glimpse of her pallid face and wild eyes on the announcement of the visitors, had roused his interest to an intense degree. He knew that there was cause connected with them for the course she was pursuing, and he resolved to fathom the mystery. His first attempt proved futile.

“By the way Guy” he had remarked to Bartoni at breakfast, “you have been in St. Louis a great deal. Did you ever, when there, meet with a Mrs. Meredith?”

“Meredith? No, I cannot remember that I ever did. Why do you ask?”

“O, a casual question. My sister’s governess came from there, and having once, undoubtedly, moved in the more refined circles of society, I thought you might possibly have known her.”

“I think not. I have no recollection of such a person.”

Conversation changed to various subjects, but had little life in it. Madeline looked sad though evidently

striving to appear cheerful. Bartoni was in no mood for talking more than politeness required, and the Doctor was sober and thoughtful. In the sad face of his child and the discontented one of her suitor, he read the difficulty between them, and it disturbed his usual happy flow of spirits. He could not see a cloud upon the beloved face of his devoted child without acute pain; and the very cause of her sadness, endeared her to him but the more. In her self-denying love, he saw a new beauty of character which exalted her. An intense and proud admiration mingled with the warm emotions of paternal affection stirring in his bosom. Now more than ever, he felt how deep would be the loss, were she to go from his fireside. The very thought brought a mist to his eyes which he brushed aside hastily to keep watchful eyes from observing.

After breakfast, Harry and Charles Lafarge, who appeared the sole exception to the general depression, strolled off together, and the Dr. prepared for his usual round of professional visits. On leaving the room, Bartoni had craved a private interview, but he felt himself unequal to it in his present state of mind, and put him off till his return. The lover submitted with a bad grace, and went to his room, and kissing the little girls, the Doctor sent them up to their governess, dismissed the servants, and turned to his daughter.

"Well, my child, how is it? Must I give you away?"

"No, no, dear papa! not now! I cannot leave you and my darlings yet," she replied eagerly, but in tearful sorrow. "I could not be so selfish as to think of it."

"Then I must tell Guy I cannot spare you? He cannot be kept long in suspense. You wish me to say to him when I grant him the interview promised, that I cannot give you up?"

"Yes, dear father, it *is* my sincere wish. It disturbs him very much, and I feel sorry to disappoint him, yet it *must* be so. Be gentle and kind with him, father, but be decided."

"Suppose he will not take my refusal, or resigns his suit in consequence?"

"Ah, no! he could not do that—at least, if he loves me, he would rather wait than give me up," she cried in a startled way. "If he could, his love would not be the treasure I have deemed it. I will not think such a thing of him."

The Doctor smiled. Such is woman's devotion. She will not believe anything unworthy the object of her love, till it is proved to her unmistakably!

"Well, my love," he said after a little pause. "I will do as you wish, the more readily since I feel how utterly miserable we should all be to lose you. But it pains me to see you thus sacrificing yourself for us. We ought to be more unselfish."

"No, no, best, dearest of fathers! you have never been guilty of a selfish thing! It is my earnest wish. I could not be happy even with him, and know that you needed me, and I far away. Only try to soften this disappointment for him, and my heart will be lighter. He feels it so keenly!"

Her eyes were full of tears, the lips quivering with grief. Dr. Clifton drew her to his heart.

"My brave, generous, noble-hearted child! How

can I ever repay such unselfish devotion! God bless you!"

"Ah! He has blessed me with a dear good father, whose comfort is above all things, whose happiness it is my joy and pride to promote. How could I leave you now, with these little, untrained children on your hands? What could you do with them? He must wait till Kate is old enough to take my place."

The conference of the afternoon was long and trying to poor Madeline who waited in painful suspense to hear the result. After her father and lover had been closeted for an hour, they sent for her,—a summons she obeyed in great fear and trembling.

Both gentlemen looked up as she entered and the smiles upon their faces somewhat reassured her.

"Come here my daughter," said the Doctor pleasantly. "We have made an amicable settlement of this little matter, which needs only your co-operation to render it complete. Guy has consented to remain with us, and make this house his home, if you will name an early day for the wedding, which leaves you still in the same position toward us, as heretofore. What do you say?"

She looked at Guy, whose eyes pleaded for an affirmative response, and with a blush and smile, she laid her hand in his. The old man breathed a deep sigh of relief. A load was taken from his heart.

"Ah! this is as it should be! Now I can see my child happy, and have all of you with me! But, pussy, you have no idea what a vast amount of argument I had to use to bring him round to my side of the ques-

tion. I am out of breath, exhausted! I leave you to punish him for his cruelty."

So saying, he took himself off, his face all aglow with happiness and genial humor. Guy clasped the girl to his bosom and murmured,—

"See how much I love you, my Madeline! I give up the long cherished dream of years, for the joy of calling you mine without delay. Now, darling, name the day, and make the time very short, for I cannot bear to wait."

Thus we leave them in the broad sunlight of restored happiness, while we look in again upon our heroine.

The children had flung their books aside for the day, and bounded joyously away, glad to be free, and the teacher with a faint sigh of relief, closed her desk and bowed her head upon it. She was very weary. On this day, her duties had been more than usually trying. She could not concentrate her thoughts upon the work before her, and bring them from the dark chaotic pool into which they were constantly flying. Agnes had observed her absence of mind and depression, but attributing it to illness, thought only of trying to lighten her labors by more than usual care; while on the contrary, Kate and Mary seized their advantage to become more careless and mischievous than ever.

For a quarter of an hour, Ora sat still in her place, the sunlight streaming in upon her hair, and lighting it to a glorious radiance. She was so still, an observer might have thought her asleep, but for the occasional shudder that passed over the slight frame. Agnes

who had come back, stood several minutes by her side, before she ventured to touch her arm and attract her attention.

"What is it, dear?" she asked looking up wearily. "Why have you come back instead of going to play with the girls?"

"I could not go with them when you looked so sick and in trouble, dear Mrs. Meredith. I feel too sorry to play."

The child's earnest tones of sympathy touched the troubled, longing heart of the woman. She drew her to her side with an impulse of strong affection.

"Dear little Agnes! supposing I am sick, and in trouble, what could you do for me? Go, darling, and play. Do not let a thought of me mar your pleasure."

"Oh, please, dont send me from you. You know I am not like them, and dont care to play as they do. I had rather stay with you. Besides, I dont want to go where I may see that man."

"What man do you mean," asked Ora in surprise.

"The tall, dark man they call Guy Bartoni. He makes me shudder whenever I look into his eyes. I feel dreadfully when I am where he is."

"Why, Agnes, what makes you? Why should he make you feel badly?"

"I do not know. But I am sure there is something in it. He is not a good man. Can you imagine how people feel when a snake looks into their eyes and charms them? Well, I feel just so when he looks at me. Oh, I cannot bear it!"

She shivered and drew closer to the side of her teacher."

"Dont talk so, my child. You do not know what you are saying. Mr. Bartoni is your guardian's friend and guest, and you must try to banish such groundless fancies," said Ora, concientiously striving to put aside her own feelings and bring the child to discard her antipathy. But Agnes was strong in her expression of loathing, and no power could remove her dread and dislike.

For the first time, Ora observed that she held in her hand a sheet of music. She took it from her and looked at it. It was an air from *Trovatore*.

"What are you doing with this, Agnes?"

"Trying to learn it. I was in the music room just now, but I could not quite get it all right. Wont you please show me how to sing this part?"

She pointed to a difficult part in the music, and looked up wishfully.

"Certainly dear, but I'm afraid it is most too hard for you. What made you choose this piece?"

"Because I liked it better than any other piece I know. It suits my feelings."

"No, no, Aggie. Dont say that. It is too sad a cry for this little child heart of yours to understand. You mistake your love for music, for sympathy with the sentiment of the song. Come, I will teach you."

They went out together, and in a few moments her rich, full tones swelled out in the most touching of Verdi's matchless compositions. "*Ah! Che La Morte Ognora!*" The child's voice chimed in with hers, clear and sweet as a bell, with a promise in its present power, of a glorious development in the future. Ora was surprised. She had often observed her love for

music, and noted with pleasure her rapid progress. But never before had such passionate feeling rung through the child's tones as thrilled her now.

"Oh! I know just how any one would feel to say such words," cried Agnes when they had finished. "I went to the Opera once with Madeline, and I cried bitterly when this part was sung."

She placed her finger upon the words—

"Out of the love I bear thee,

Yield I my life for thee!

Wilt thou not think—

Wilt thou not think of me?

Oh! fare thee well, my Leonora, fare thee well."

"I could scarcely breathe! Oh, if one I love so much, were to leave me, I should die!" and from the earnest, passionate tones in which she uttered the words, Ora knew that she felt what she expressed.

"Ah me!" she sighed inwardly. "Poor, strongly loving, passionate little heart! What bitterness may be in store for you, should you ever find one on whom your affections may rest!"

At this moment Madeline came in upon them, wearing a look of radiant happiness. Ora's heart beat heavily. What was coming now. Her prophetic fears spoke but too truly.

"Come, into my room a little while, please" she begged slipping her arm around her with loving confidence. "I want to talk to you."

For a moment Ora struggled with the feelings that threatened to overpower her. Then she bade Agnes go down stairs and stay with the girls, and went away with her eager companion.

Madeline in the excess of her happiness, seated her, and threw herself in childlike abandon at her feet, resting her fair face upon her lap while she clasped both hands in hers.

“Ah! it is so nice to have somebody to talk to when we are too happy to contain ourselves! I am so glad that I can make a friend of you, and not feel that I am losing my dignity by treating you as an equal. For you are indeed my superior, in every respect, and are so good and patient always, I must love you. But, here I am running on without saying what I brought you to hear! I am so glad its all over. Oh, I was so heart sick last night; so sad and fearful to-day! Guy was so disappointed and angry when I told him that I could not leave my father, and said so many bitter things. He is so impulsive, he cannot bear opposition. But he had a long talk with papa, and now it is all right. He will stay here—all of us can live together, and I can be with my dear charges till they no longer need me! Ah! I am *so* glad. I have had to make him a promise for an early wedding in consequence of his yielding to papa’s request to stay here, and we are to be married early in the spring.”

She did not see the deathly hue of the face above her, and was too absorbed in her own thoughts to note the trembling of the fingers threading her hair. And so, while the pale lips closed in mute agony, repressing the cry that rose from her heart, the young girl went on with her story, telling her of the plans formed for future happiness, and the many glorious prospects spread out before them.

It was quite dark ere she had done and rose to go

below, so that she did not see the strained look of suffering upon the face before her, in the dim light, and she left her, unconscious of the misery she had awakened.

On separating from his betrothed, Guy had gone up to his room, his thoughts divided between pleasure and discontent. Could good Dr. Clifton have looked into the man's heart, and seen the secret motives which prompted his actions, he would have shrank shudderingly from committing his child to the care of such a being.

Bartoni, was as his name indicated him, of Italian descent. His father was a native of Italy, coming from a family of great wealth and influence. He boasted a long line of titled ancestry, of which he was very proud, but his father had fallen in love with the country in which he took a fancy to travel, and one of her fair daughters captured his affections. He married in New York and died shortly after the birth of his only son. Mrs. Bartoni remained with her relations after his death, and as the boy grew up, gave all her attention to his education. She was a very kind, indulgent mother, and the strong passions transmitted from father to son, made her at an early period of his life, the slave to his wishes and whims. And so, growing up thus uncontrolled and unrestrained by steady hands, at twenty, he was as wild and willful as it was possible for him to be. Nothing but a strong element of pride in his nature, saved him from open recklessness. Shortly after his twentieth birthday his mother died, and the funeral rites were scarcely ended, ere he left the city for parts unknown.

Two years passed away, and he came back. A change had come over him. He was less wild, more steady and manly than heretofore, and his friends grew very hopeful with this good omen. Nothing transpired to change the favorable light in which he succeeded in placing himself, and when he saw Madeline Clifton, and sought to engage her interest, the Dr. had quietly suffered it, feeling that he was safe in doing so.

Still we have seen the course she had pursued, and know how it was that the marriage did not take place at the time. She pleaded her youth, and won his promise to wait in silence. He went to California in the interval, but of that portion of his life during his absence, no one knew anything beyond what was surmised from his letters. This, however proving satisfactory, no one sought to know more.

In returning, he had brought with him a friend, Charles Lafarge, who he said, had shared his wanderings amid strange scenes. They were inseparable. He spoke glowingly of his position, possessions and talents, and the bright, handsome face of the stranger did the rest. Three days had not passed, ere he became a general favorite.

We have said that Bartoni sought his room, his mind divided between pleasure and discontent. The grim smile upon his dark features certainly betokened satisfaction as he threw himself upon a lounge and tossed the masses of raven hair away from his face, muttering half audibly:—

“Pretty sure thing, though! Guess I can stand the terms for a while, when the bird is safe in my hands.

Leave myself a little time to transfer it to a cage of my own choice, when the old man's purse strings have yielded handsomely to my wants. By Jupiter, Madeline *is* a handsome—yes, a queenly girl, but deuced if I don't take some of the spirit out of her when she is safely my own. *I* yield now! We'll see who gives in six months hence!"

And it was to this man, Dr. Clifton was about to give his Pearl beyond price! To this man *she* had given her sweet, pure love!

Suddenly upon the stillness, broke strains of rich, entrancing melody. With the first notes, he started to a sitting posture and listened intently, scarcely moving till the last tones melted away in the stillness. Then he breathed heavily and exclaimed!

"There can be but one voice on earth like that! Surely, I would know it amongst a thousand! Yet, how absurdly I am talking! It were impossible for her to be here. But *who* is it, then? Ah! I have it! The Governess! I remember a child's voice accompanying hers. Besides I heard the family speak of her glorious voice. No wonder. But what a wonderful resemblance. I could almost have sworn that it was Glendora's."

He heard Madeline's voice as they came out of the music room and went down the corridor and eager for a glimpse at the stranger's face, looked cautiously through the door. He was too late, however, to catch anything but a glimpse of the two forms as they disappeared in Madeline's chamber, and turned away disappointed.

"I must be mistaken," he muttered. "She is a

visitor, doubtless; I cannot think of Madeline on such familiar terms with the childrens' governess! I must find out who she is."

This little incident awakened a new train of thought which he indulged, pacing slowly back and forth through his room till the servant came in to light the gas. Then he took from his trunk materials for writing, and remained thus engaged, till summoned to tea.

On going below, he glanced around as if expecting to see some one. Madeline observed it with a look of inquiry, and he said smiling:

"I thought you had a visitor. I heard such sweet music a little while since, I was tempted to hope for a repetition. Who was the fair songstress?"

"That was Mrs. Meredith. She does sing very sweetly. I do not wonder you were charmed. I never hear her sing without tears springing to my eyes. Her expression is matchless. She makes you feel every word she utters, and evidently feels them more keenly herself. I would give anything for her musical talent."

"Or an equal portion of your own" laughed her father. "How is she, my daughter? I have not seen her to-day. She was complaining yesterday?"

"Somewhat better, I think, but far from well. She has been in the schoolroom all day, and looks pale and tired. I hope she wont get ill from over exertion."

Guy looked surprised. He could not understand the deep interest expressed in a mere governess, much less the close intimacy of his affianced bride with one occupying so inferior a position.

"She must be a prodigy," he remarked somewhat dryly, "to elicit such praise and awaken such interest. Who is she?"

"The lady of whom I spoke the other morning, as a former resident of St. Louis," said Harry in reply, without waiting for others to speak. "She appears to be creating a commotion. Father and sister Mad were her sworn allies from the beginning; Kate and Mary soon succumbed to her charms. Little black eyed, tornado Aggie, was harder to manage. She was never known to love anybody in her life, but after a certain time, there was war between two opposing forces. The governess proved the stronger of the two, and brought the little rebel to terms most extraordinary. She now worships her very footsteps. I am the only unconquered reprobate of the family I believe, and am patiently waiting my turn."

He spoke lightly, but he knew he was interesting his auditor by the expression of his face, and hoped thus to catch a clue to the mystery he was endeavoring quietly to solve.

"Why, really, sir," observed Mr. Lafarge, "your governess becomes quite a heroine. Does she associate with the family? I am becoming curious to see her."

This was what Harry wanted. He hoped thus, without seeming to desire it, to bring about a meeting. Dr. Clifton furthered his wishes unconsciously.

"We will ask her to come down, if she feels able, and favor us with some music. I enjoy her singing very much, and have a proof that you will, also Guy, by your remark a few moments since. Mr. Lafarge

has yet to judge from personal knowledge, if it is to his taste."

"I shall certainly be glad of the opportunity," returned the gentleman. "You quite interest me."

A little silence fell upon the party gathered round the board, broken at length by a cry that startled them as by the shock of an earthquake, it was so wild and piercing. It came from above, and Madeline without apology sprang through the door and darted up the stairway. The cries continued, proceeding from Ora's room. Dr. Clifton followed more slowly. Harry remained with the guests, in breathless suspense to learn the cause of the alarm.

The scene presented to Madeline's view on entering the chamber, was one of wild confusion. Ada sat screaming in childish terror upon the floor, while her nurse supported the head of the fallen mother upon her lap. Ora lay pale and still as if death had smitten her with one blow from the fair scenes of life, a crimson stream pouring over the purple lip and staining the carpet by her side. Agnes stood over her with locked hands and rigid features. Terror and anguish had deprived her of speech after the first wild, agonized screams that had brought the family to the scene.

"Oh, Father of mercies!" ejaculated the girl as she hastily bent over the prostrate form. "What is this? How did it happen? Tell me, some of you. Can you speak, Agnes? Father, father, come quickly!"

"Here I am" said the Dr. entering. "Why, what does this mean? Ah! a hemorrhage! Help me, daughter, to lift her on the bed. Hold up her head nurse,

till I can lift her in my arms. There, that is right."

They laid her on the couch, and with great promptness, the old man applied restoratives. A crowd was round the door. He ordered every one kept out, and enjoined quiet.

"Kate and Mary, go down stairs my children, and nurse, take that child from the room. Agnes, go with them. Go, Madeline, and send John to me to get what I want. Tell them down stairs that it is not anything very serious, I hope. Then come back to me. Above all, do keep things quiet. I hate such confusion."

His orders were obeyed promptly by all save Agnes. She crept into the shadow of the curtains and remained like a statue, her acute senses alive to every word and action that might indicate hope or despair.

In a short time the hemorrhage was stopped and the sufferer opened her eyes languidly. The Dr. bade her be quiet in very kind tones; told her that her recovery depended on her silence, and strove to re-assure her by his manner, in every way. A look of gratitude swept over the white face, and a mist obscured the dark orbs, but she remained perfectly still as he directed.

Then from Jane, the girl's story, as repeated to Madeline after being sent out, he learned how it all happened.

After giving Ada her supper, she had carried her into her mother's room to undress and put her to bed. She thought the lady looked very pale as she lay upon the sofa, but as she was always pale, she had not paid

particular attention. Ada had clambered up for a kiss where she was lying, and Mrs. Meredith raising herself to a posture more suited to her efforts, suddenly pressed her hand over her bosom as if in acute pain. A fit of coughing followed, and she got up and started across the room toward the dressing table. When about mid way, she paused, uttered a faint cry, and fell to the floor as if dead—the blood pouring from her mouth in a stream.

The first cry of alarm, was from the girl, and had attracted Agnes who had never left the Music Room. The child's screams had reached the dining room and brought Madeline and the Dr. to the spot.

Toward midnight, a burning fever set in. Madeline who had insisted on watching the sufferer the first part of the night, summoned her father who shook his head uneasily. He did not like the symptoms. As he feared, a dangerous illness ensued which threatened to terminate the existence of the patient.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WEEK had passed away since the incident which had occurred to disturb the regular routine of life in the Clifton Mansion. The morning after the catastrophe, the visitors left, cutting their visit much shorter than they had expected to do under the circumstances prevailing. The portion of Guy's relations with whom he was on intimate terms, were absent on a European tour. Those still in town, had been estranged from him by an old, boyish freak, leaving him under the necessity now, of going to his own lonely residence on the Hudson or taking up lodgings in a Hotel. He preferred the latter, and on Tuesday afternoon both himself and friend were snugly installed at the A——, where they intended to remain until the return of his aunt's family, who were expected home in a few weeks.

Dr. Clifton was unremitting in his care of the invalid. Madeline devoted. But she lay scorched with fever and wild in delirium. The hearts of the watchers ached with the piteous wailings that issued from the parched lips of the sufferer. Sometimes they were startled by the wild bursts of agony that escaped her, and incoherent ravings of a murdered child. She seemed to fancy herself the mother of a beautiful boy, for whose life she pleaded in passionate vehemence. Then she would wail out that he was dead

and that her heart was broken. Often she fancied herself in a wilderness, with her child in her arms, helpless to get out. She would call upon friends to come to her, and save her. Then she was whirling over strange lands, and amid strangers. But all this was so wildly confused, no clue could be gained as to a fixed meaning, and they termed it but the distortions of a fevered, unsettled imagination.

On the sixth night, Dr. Clifton pronounced a crisis at hand. A young lady friend who lived next door, kindly shared the anxious vigil, and the three forms of the watchers looked like so many statues, as the hour of midnight approached. Madeline sat upon the side of the couch, her eyes bent upon the pale, thin face. Dr. Clifton beside the bed clasping one tiny hand, his fingers on the faint, fluttering pulse. Miss Gerhard sat a little apart, but wearing an expression of anxious interest awakened by the many enthusiastic praises she had heard from Madeline and the children, of their lovely governess.

With a low moan the sick woman tossed up her hands and an expression of scorn and anguish swept her features. The great dark blue eyes fixed as if upon some hated object, and blazed resentment as she broke forth passionately.

"Away sir, and never *dare* to speak to me again! The very sound of your voice is pollution! I would have you know, sir, that lonely as I am, neglected, scorned, if you will, I am still able to defend myself from insult, and will do it. Go from me this instant."

Dr. Clifton looked up quickly at his daughter whose face was the picture of angelic pity. He was begin-

ning to see more than the mere images presented through the medium of delirium, while she was still blinded by ignorance. A remembrance of her brief history before she came to them, connected this fragment with it, vaguely, it is true; but still definitely enough to convince him that she was retracing in feverish paths, the footsteps trodden in her past life.

“Ah,” she again murmured—now sadly and brokenly “Edward, Edward! but for you, I had never been thus exposed to insult and wrong. Oh, *what* has come over you—where is your pride and self-respect, thus to leave me to struggle alone with difficulties!”

The revelations were becoming too marked and painful, and the good old physician administered a potion hastily, to quiet her ravings, while Madeline with a soft sponge, gently bathed the white brow from which the beautiful hair was tossed back in luxuriant waves and scattered upon the pillow. They could not bear to sever this wealth of beauty from her head, and had striven with all care to save it, succeeding by keeping napkins, wet in ice water, laid over the hot brow.

In a few moments she became quiet and lay still. A gray pallor slowly crept over the features, and the scarlet lips gradually grew pale. The Dr's eyes were riveted upon her face. Madeline was trembling with the great fear that swelled her heart. The shadow of Death was upon the beautiful form. Would it settle there, and still it to eternal slumber?

Whiter, whiter grew the pallid face. It looked like

a pure sculpture of parian marble in its immovable beauty. The large eyes were but half veiled by the long, dark lashes, and the little hands lay limp and cold across her bosom. Ah! surely the dread Destroyer was at his work! A moment more, and it would be finished!

"Oh, papa! *will* she die?—is she dead?" breathed the terrified girl almost inaudibly.

He placed his ear to her heart. It beat faintly. An almost imperceptible respiration moved the linen over her bosom. But the faint spark of life was so uncertain, he scarcely dared reply, and she took it for granted that she was already dead. Bowing her face upon her hands she wept silently.

Several moments passed away. A deep inspiration heaved the bosom wherein the faint heart still throbbed lowly. Then the breath became more full and strong. A steady inspiration followed that heavy sigh, and slowly, very slowly, the color, like the delicate tint of a seashell, dawned upon the cheeks and lips. The eyes closed in a natural repose, and a gentle perspiration stood upon the forehead. With intense interest, the physician watched the dawning of a new life, as it were, and as it increased, a glow of deep satisfaction settled upon his kind face.

"Safe!" he ejaculated. "Look up, my daughter, I think the danger past."

A low murmur of thankfulness responded. The generous girl had come to love the quiet, sorrowing woman, with a love almost beyond her own understanding. The restoration of her life at a moment when she thought her gone forever, was to her loving

heart, like a special boon from the divine source of all mercies. Thankfully she bowed her head again, now in earnest prayer.

Half an hour later, Madeline prevailed upon her father to retire. Ora slept peacefully, and after preparing a place, in an adjoining chamber communicating with the one they now occupied, for Miss Gerhard, she turned the gas to a twilight, and softly laid herself beside the invalid.

She did not try to sleep. Notwithstanding her father's assurance of the speedy recovery of their charge, she feared a change, and lay wakefully observant.

Sometime passed away, and at length she closed her eyes in utter weariness. The watching of the past week, had worn her very much. Yet the attendant excitement of the vigils, had prevented her feeling it so keenly as she felt it now. She was nearly falling asleep unawares, when a faint movement at the foot of the couch, caused her to look up. For a moment the vision that arrested her gaze, caused the blood to circle icily about her heart.

A tiny figure stood there, a loose flowing robe of white falling about it, while long, waving curls floated over the little shoulders. A pair of large, eager eyes rested upon the two figures stretched upon the bed, shining like stars in the dim light.

"Ada! my child! what brought you here, darling?"

She rose quickly, and took the little form in her arms. The child was shivering with cold, but was very quiet, submitting herself passively to her embrace. Fearing to waken the sleeper, Madeline took

her to the far side of the chamber, near the grate, and wrapped a warm shawl around the chilled limbs.

"Tell, me darling," she repeated. "How came you to leave your nurse? What brought you here?"

"Ada couldn't sleep," said the child piteously, "Ada wanted mamma."

"Dear little angel! God has kindly spared your mamma. You shall have her again, please Heaven! But you ought not to come out here in the cold at this time of night. Why could not you go to sleep, baby?"

"Mamma said Ada must never sleep till she had said her prayers, and Ada did not say them to-night. Jenny was cross, and covered her up before she could say them. Where is my mamma? I want my mamma!"

"Poor child!" cried Madeline. "It cannot see its mamma to-night. You shall see her to-morrow, darling. Come! Maddy will take you back to bed, and hear your prayers. Then you must go to sleep, and when it gets light, you may come in here and see your mother, my pet."

"No, no! Ada wants to stay. Let Ada go to mamma now!"

She looked toward the bed, and held out her arms pleadingly. Her little lips quivered as if about to cry, and Madeline trembled lest she should startle the sick mother with her screams. She was perplexed but strove to soothe her with promises, which the little one utterly refused.

"If I take you to mamma, and let you kiss her, will you then go back with me to the nursery?" she

questioned. The child's face lighted gladly as she replied :

"Oh, yes, let Ada kiss mamma!"

She took her in her arms, and crossed the room quietly, whispering her to be very still. The child was carried to her mamma, and looked in wishful hesitation at the thin face lying before her. Then she spread her little arms to clasp her neck in glad impulse, forgetful of all, save that she was with her mother. Madeline drew her back in alarm, and a cry of disappointment broke from her lips.

Ora's eyes opened quietly, and gazed upon the two figures—one face marred by grief and disappointment—the other with alarm. She recognized them instantly, and a faint smile broke over her features as she tried to speak.

"Baby! poor baby. It wants its mother," she breathed weakly. "Give her to me, Madeline."

Fearing to do more harm by opposition than compliance, the gentle nurse laid the child on the spot indicated by the mother's eyes, and with a cry of satisfaction, she nestled her bright head against the tender bosom, and clasped her neck with both arms. Ora looked up gratefully murmuring.

"Poor little baby! she can't do without me. Have I been sick long? I am so weak."

"Not very long. About a week. But you will get well now, thank God. Do be quiet, though, dear Mrs. Meredith, you must not talk. Shall I take Ada away?"

"No, no. Let her stay. She will not disturb me. How much trouble we must have given you all."

“No indeed! Dont think of it. And now you *must* not talk. Go to sleep, and if Ada needs attention, I will take care of her. Now I will lie down with you both.”

There were few hours left for rest, but ere day dawned, Madeline slept heavily beside mother and child. Ada went to sleep without a word or movement, her little longing heart at rest! No one had ever dreamed that every night the poor child had stood silently by the door in her little white gown, vainly hoping to get in, and that the nurse, waking and missing her, had sought and carried her back, chilled to numbness, to her little crib. The girl was afraid to tell, lest she should be censured for want of watchfulness, and it was long ere they learned how the yearning baby heart had suffered thus silently in unchildlike patience.

CHAPTER IX.

SPRING had come, bright and beautiful, and Ora with her wan spiritual face, began to look forward gladly to the green freshness of earth, hoping to regain health and strength with the genial sunshine and the fragrance of flowers. Charles Lafarge in company with Guy Bartoni, had frequently called at the house since her illness, but she had no difficulty in avoiding them while yet an invalid. Now she was resuming the old routine of duty, but studiously refused to participate in the social arrangements, as heretofore. Madeline expostulated; but she said:

“Indeed, I feel so weak and poorly fitted for society, I had rather keep my own room. You are very good, I know, and I thank you. But think, dear Madeline, of what possible advantage can it be to me to be seen with you by your friends, treated in all respects one may say, as an equal? They will wonder who and what I am, where I come from, and all about me. The apparent equality, will rouse curiosity that I prefer to avoid. My life has been painful, and I would shield the Past from prying eyes. I cannot help it if I am over sensitive. Suffering has made me so however. Let me be, sweet little friend, except such times as when you are alone. Then I will join you at your meals. My evenings I would like always to spend alone after Ada goes to sleep. When you have

company, pray dont think of my joining you at any time."

This was more than she had ever said of herself directly, since she had been with them, and Madeline drank it—eagerly. She was alive with interest since the illness wherein so much that was wild and frightful had been murmured, and she longed for the history of the governess, more than anything else on earth. Once she had asked her father to explain if he could, and he replied gravely: "My child, what I know, I am not at liberty to tell. She has suffered, but I believe her pure as an angel—almost as good. Be patient, love, and perhaps she will sometime explain herself, more than I could tell you."

And it was with this hope increased that she now heard the words Ora dropped casually. It shone brightly, wistfully from her eyes as she regarded her.

"You must do as you like, of course, but we feel too much interest not to wish to have you with us more, and to have others know you. They would not feel surprised at our regard, could they know you as we do."

"Ah, you are too flattering," was the grateful, playful response. Yet a look of trouble flitted instantly over the thin face, and she turned her eyes upon the young girl in half sorrowful inquiry.

"What do you know of me to make you love me? I am not good; I am not very social or lovable in any particular way; your own generous heart does more for me than my merits. In fact I have given you a great deal of trouble, and little else. I dont know just why you are all so good to me."

"Come, you shall not depreciate yourself. Nor will I pamper your vanity," she added playfully, "by enumerating the virtues that make us love you. But seriously, I want you to be with us more. Even Harry, who is the oddity of our household, expressed wonder at your severe seclusion, and said he missed you. Furthermore, he commissioned me to bring you out of your 'burrow,' as he termed it." The Teacher's brow flushed hotly, and the old light of angry disturbance came back to her eyes Madeline had seen on the night when he suggested the stage as a more lucrative profession. She recoiled at having reopened the wound afresh, and hastened to change the conversation.

It was not, however, a memory of that insult that disturbed her, but the knowledge that he still pursued her with that spirit of annoyance which was growing so poignant. The faint hope that he had forgotten it during her illness, was swept away by a single sentence. She knew well that the household enemy stood guard at the door to aim at her some poisonous shaft the very moment she should emerge from the sheltering precincts of her own domain.

Madeline left her, feeling both pain and disappointment. A long conversation failed to win her over to her wishes in regard to general intercourse with the family and special friends, or to gain any confidence from her whatever, relative to her past life, beyond what she had said. Madeline was generous to a fault, and not over worldly in her mind. Had she been, she could never have expected society to regard their governess in the favorable light in which she so lovingly sought to place her. She did not stop to ask the rea-

son why people would not accept as an equal, one occupying a subordinate position, even though she might be considered as such, and so treated in their own family. Ora, gifted, accomplished to a high degree, noble in her nature and true womanly principle, was to society nothing, while she combined with these qualities poverty and self dependence which made it necessary for her to labor for her bread.

Later in the day, accident threw her face to face with Harry Clifton as she passed from her own room to one on the floor above on some trifling errand. She flushed deeply, then paled. She could not look upon her enemy, as she had gradually learned to consider him, wholly unmoved. But drawing her slight form up haughtily, she would have passed with a cold nod, had he not interposed to stay her progress.

He held out a hand to her with a frank pleasing gesture, while his handsome face lighted as if with genuine pleasure.

"How nice it seems to see you out again, Mrs. Meredith," he exclaimed. "I declare, the house began to assume a funeral-like aspect while you were ill. You are growing stronger now though, and we all hope to see you in your accustomed places again. I cannot tell you how we miss your little quiet figure amongst us. You are keeping yourself too close entirely. Come out now, and have exercise with us."

"Thank you, sir." She returned politely but with a tinge of coldness she could not melt, in her tones. "You are kind, but I am still indisposed for society where I can avoid it."

He looked at her keenly.

"I see," he said bluntly, "You have never forgiven me for that rude speech of mine. May I ask it now?"

"There is no need, Mr. Clifton. I never remember such trifles to any one's prejudice and had nearly forgotten the circumstance entirely."

"Then what is it? You do not like my society, and since you have recovered, are more persistently cold and unapproachable than previously. Why do you avoid me? I have not seen you to speak half a dozen words since you left your room to resume your school duties.

Ora evaded a direct reply, and with an excuse, forced her way past him and left his presence. He looked after her, the light on his face changing to one of deep displeasure.

"By the Lord," he muttered under his breath, "That woman is a riddle I will solve yet. She puzzles,—she interests me strangely with her beautiful face and haughty manner. I'll solve that mystery around her, or my head shall lose its cunning. How she tantalizes me! Gentle, loving and tender to all others—I have seen it! To me, cold as ice and sharp as steel. Here is metal worth trying. Let me prove it and see if it is true throughout."

He went down stairs, took his hat from the stand in the hall, and went out upon the street.

It was warm and bright without, and the streets were thronged. He had not gone far when he met Guy and Charlie, as he now familiarly called the latter. His greeting was warm and really joyous.

"Halloo! I'm glad to meet you, gentlemen!" he said extending to each a hand. "Out sunning your-

selves, eh? Beautiful day, isn't it. What a lucky fellow I am to have met you just here. It is near by, and I have just got some paintings home I want you to look at. Come round and give me your opinion of them."

"With all the pleasure imaginable," responded Guy. Charlie acquiesced readily, and the three proceeded to Dr. Clifton's.

Madeline was out, and they went up to the gallery of which the family were justly proud. Paintings were Harry's especial passion, and he never lost an opportunity to increase the store already collected so happily in the long room where the lights and shadows fell upon them so advantageously.

Sometime passed in their examination and criticism. Guy's taste was fine, and his remarks very discriminating. Leaving them for a moment on a slight pretext, Harry lightly descended by a private stairway, came out in the hall leading past the music room and entered one beyond, as if on some errand. The one glance directed within, showed him the young teacher in a far corner, selecting some music, with Agnes by her side. He knew it was her usual hour for giving her pupil a lesson in vocal music, and had made his calculations nicely. In a moment he returned to the gallery.

"Well, have you done here, Guy? How do you like the collection as a whole. You are a good judge. Tell me frankly."

"It cannot be surpassed in any private gallery in New York," was the reply, made from honest conviction. "Some of these are of the grandest and rarest

works to be found. I cannot express the appreciation I feel of their great value."

"Thank you, Guy. Your compliment is very gratifying. I have one more I should like to show you. It hangs in the music room, and represents a young girl seated by a stream near the base of the Rocky Mountains, playing upon a Harp. It looks strangely out of place here, but the workmanship is superb. A long line of emigrant's wagons and large groups in the background of rough looking men and women, explain her presence, but she appears set apart by her dress, habits and exceeding beauty from the others. Come and see it."

He led the way, and the others followed with interest to see the picture. At the threshold Harry slightly paused to say:

"Pardon, Mrs. Meredith. I am going to show these gentlemen a painting that is here. We will not long intrude."

He turned toward the painting as he uttered the apology, but his glance never quitted her face for an instant as she lifted her eyes from the pile of music on a stand beside her, and encountered the strangers. Then he saw her pale and gasp for breath as on a previous occasion. Guy and Charlie stood as if rooted to the spot. The former took a few hasty strides forward "Glendora! Can it be! For Heaven's sake how came you here?"

His face was as pale as hers,—his eyes wild and full of passionate light. Harry took it all in with an inward exultation admirably covered by a show of extreme surprise.

"So you *are* acquainted, after all," he exclaimed. "Why, Mrs. Meredith, how is all this? I should have thought you would have recognized Mr. Bartoni when you saw him before."

The first deep, sharp, bitter sting of the wound was over now. The deed was hopelessly done. There was no escape. Anger at the perpetrator of the mischief was the best remedy she could have had for the gaping wound. She turned a scathing glance upon him as he stood before her.

"Did I ever profess *not* to know him, Mr. Clifton? You never asked me if he was known to me. But had you not done what you have to-day, it would have been better for all concerned. Guy Bartoni, I have no words to say to you, sir," she said firmly and with icy dignity, and turning with haughty mien to leave them. No one strove to detain her. The incident fell like a blow upon the two visitors and the poor victim. Harry saw his advantage, and for the time being, was elated with his success.

Guy turned and strode rapidly to a window, where he stood for several moments in deep thought. He was evidently disturbed to an intense degree, but in a few moments he came back looking serious—almost sad.

"Harry, is *that* the governess of whom I have heard so much? Is that your sister's and my betrothed's bosom friend. Tell me that it is not so?"

"But it *is* so! Why? For Heaven's sake, explain this mystery!"

Bartoni turned again and strode heavily over the floor. Then he came back and said regretfully:

"Harry, I am the last man on earth to cast suspicion on the fair fame of a woman. I would not do it now, but it is just to you to say that *she* is no fit inmate for this house, and I *know* it."

His glance bore a deeper significance than his words.

"Good Heaven's! Can it be possible!" The young man's tones were full of indignation; but neither Ora or Guy had worn a whiter face than his at that moment. He had gone too far, and without knowing it, planted a dagger in his own heart which he dreamed not of till he felt the sting of its wound.

"Guy! this matter must be fully explained now," he said huskily. "This is no time for false modesty or quibbling. You must tell both my father and myself what you know."

"Is not my word sufficient, Harry? I have said she is no fit inmate for this house, and my friend, Charles Lafarge will bear me out in the assertion, if you need farther evidence than this."

His tone was cold and offended.

"Pardon me Guy. I do not mean to doubt your word, but it is not enough. Tell me all—when and where you knew her. I may be excused my pertinacity under the circumstances. She has long been an inmate of the house, favored by the family as one of us, and I would know *whom* we have thus favored, in all the particulars."

"You *are* pertinacious, truly," said Guy, annoyed beyond his patience. He had gone as far as he wished, but he was now compelled beyond his limit. "But since you wish it, I will tell you that I met her in a

Southern City, where she appeared to be in extreme want. I know nothing of her history beyond the fact that she was separated from her husband. I cannot affirm the cause, tho' evil minded people might easily construe it in an uncharitable light from her subsequent life. I will not enlarge her faults. Want has much to do with sin and its accompaniment of misery. I pitied her from my soul, and aided her in a measure. But I have said enough. Will it suffice you?"

"Yes. One thing more, however! What name did she bear?"

"I declare, I have forgotten all but the first, which is Glendora. Do you remember it Charlie?"

"Dumont, I think" said the other readily.

"Enough!" cried Harry turning from the room. "Gentlemen, we will seek my father."

The three young men proceeded down stairs with various emotions. Harry was still white and his eyes looked stony. He could not recede now from the path he had entered, and he summoned all his courage to get through. Guy was angry and uneasy, yet forced to appear calmly quiescent. Charles Lafarge looked pained and deeply disturbed.

Dr. Clifton looked up from some papers as his son entered accompanied by the young men. He saw instantly, that something unusual had occurred, and questioned them in the first moment as to the cause.

"Harry, Guy, what has happened?" The son's voice was very husky as he repeated the little incident of the afternoon, and its results. The Dr. listened in bewilderment. Guy confirmed all that Harry said, with

some further particulars, and then a deep silence fell upon the whole party.

Five, ten minutes passed. The old man paced the room thoughtfully—the son stood in the shadow of a window, his face hidden from the inmates. The two gentlemen sat uneasily awaiting the issue of this event.

At last the Dr. heaved a heavy, painful sigh. There were traces of tears on his cheek as he looked up and said :

“Well, I suppose I must believe what you both so strongly assert, but if any others had said it of her, I should have turned them from my door as villianous slanderers. I know Guy, that your interest is linked with ours, and cannot think you actuated by other than pure motives in this revelation. It seems almost impossible, though. She is so fair, so lovely, so high minded. Few have her intellect and strong womanly traits of character. It is hard to think her aught but what is spotlessly pure and good. Here her deportment has ever been that of a lady. How hard it seems now, good as she has been in *our* eyes, to turn her out into the cold world. Yet we must do it, I suppose.”

There was much sorrow, but neither anger or indignation in his tones. Had he searched his great generous heart, he would have seen how utterly it denied a belief in the vile tale to destroy a good, true woman.

At length the young men escaped, glad to be free, and Harry went to his room with a heavy load upon his heart, while his father sought his daughter. The father attributed the stern hard look and manner of his son, to anger at the supposed deception, but could

he have followed him to his room and watched him there in his misery and self reproach; he would have been enlightened strangely.

At the moment when Harry Clifton had reached forth his hand, and in his cruel, wilful might, smote her from the fair pedestal on which she stood, he found that he loved her better than his own life!

Ah! Blind, wilful mortality! How mad we are!



CHAPTER X.

By what singular circumstances was that once happy mansion the shelter of misery, where all should have been joy. And still more singular, that one single being with a want of manly principle, should have done it all. It was through Guy Bartoni that the poor governess first felt a keen sense of anguish. Through him Lina had suffered for a brief space of time which plunged others as well as herself in misery. And now through him they were all suffering together. The Dr. found Madeline at last engaged in domestic duties, and calling her into the Library imparted to her the story he had heard. She was wild with grief and indignant astonishment. She could not credit the story, yet her lover had told the tale, and in the recognition, there was too much proof. She remembered too, how Ora had avoided Guy on various pretexts, and bringing to mind every-

thing, together with her own candid statement of a painful past into which she could not allow the curious to pry, she found a dark array against which her confused brain strove vainly to combat. The struggle was harder since it was between the two—her friend, as she had fondly called her, and her lover. Could she doubt him, one whom she loved as life? Besides, what did she know of Ora to dispute her lover's truth in regard to her. She was alone, friendless, wrapped in a vail of mystery none could fathom. Conviction struggled hard with her love and generous feelings. She thought of everything that had occurred since her arrival at the house, and with all the evidence against her, for her life, she could not think of the patient, quiet, self-possessed and loving woman as other than pure, spotless, high souled. There seemed an atmosphere about her elevating in itself. All had felt it who even came in contact with her. How could she bring herself to turn coldly away and cast her from her heart?"

Yet the world would hear of this, and now for the sake of *others*, she remembered what course it would pursue toward her if she dared to harbor one on whom the blighting breath of suspicion had fallen. For her sisters sake, she must cast all other thoughts and feelings aside, and act the hard, cold woman of the world—turn a lonely woman out into its mists in the storm and the whirlpool of life with none to trust—none to save, if the billows grew too strong for her woman's power to combat! What bitter, bitter tears fell from the brown eyes! what agony stirred the noble woman's heart in the girlish bosom!

The conflict grew stronger as thought worked laboriously through the dark mists. Wearied, overcome with it, she sank by her father's side and wept passionately.

"Oh, papa, what can we do? I can *never* tell her to go! I could not bear to repeat this story to her! She *seems* so good, so true! Oh, papa, *can* you believe it?"

"Daughter, daughter, Lina, darling, be more calm. How can we help it? It is very painful. I am as willing to discredit it as you can be, but the proof is too strong. I have been thinking over what she told me of herself, and I confess that I cannot bring my mind to view her story as false. Yet the two will not run together wholly. She may have left out the part I have just heard, and related the truth in the part she did reveal. Yet if it *be* true, I cannot believe this of her, for it seems so opposite to the course she pursued all her young life. I would I had the power to investigate the whole affair."

"It would be but just. And yet," said the girl while a hot flush stained her cheeks. "I should not say so, perhaps, since my words imply a doubt of Guy's veracity."

"Madeline," said the father tenderly. "Mrs. Meredith is a poor lonely, and if we cast her off—a friendless woman. She has suffered deeply, I do surely believe. I have always thought that suffering caused by the wrong of others to herself. Not from any wrong she ever did to any one. More than this, she has a little helpless child, who will share the mother's blight out in the world. Now, supposing Guy was

mistaken. Would it not be more worthy in us to investigate and prove this mistake than bring so much shame and suffering on a lonely struggling woman? And we will suppose further. Now mind, my child, I am only supposing a case!

"Well, supposing, I say, Guy for some motive, should have wronged her, seeing her powerless to refute this charge. Would you not rather know it *now*, than after your marriage with him?"

"*Papa!*"

Madeline's eyes looked up at him through her tears, in utter astonishment.

"Oh, tell me, *do* you suspect Guy of any hidden motive! Do you doubt his truth? For mercy's sake, tell me!"

"No, Lina, no!" he answered very sadly. "I have done wrong to put such a case to you, my child. I hardly know why I did it, I'm sure. But for this woman my heart is full of pity. I am in a quandary how to act. God help us that we do not wrong her, bitterly wrong her!"

Farther and farther down into these two noble hearts, the good Angel was working. Gradually the purest, sweetest fountains were reached, and flowed forth at the touch, a divine wave of *Charity* that overflowed and exalted them. The maiden's heart was all aglow with it. The lips first to speak the sentiment.

"Father, we *must* not send her out into the world yet. Let us investigate the matter fully. Bid Guy, Harry, all of our household who have heard this thing, be quiet for a little time. We must get at the

exact truth before we dare to turn against one of God's children, and she laboring so faithfully and bravely under our very eyes, in the path of right. Guy is a strong man, as you say. She a weak woman. Let me be unselfish and above all, true to my own sex. I will not turn from her and leave her to die in shame, unloved, uncared for. What might be her fate, should she go away from us? What may we not spare her if she stays? And, oh! if it *should* prove false, though my heart should break, all my life I should thank God for the *Truth*.

"My brave, my noble child! God bless you, darling!"

Dr. Clifton's eyes brimmed till the tears fell on the bright brown hair falling over his knees, and he bent with fervent, tender reverence to press a kiss on the spotless brow.

But let us follow Ora.

Crushed, quivering, almost stunned beneath the blow, she staggered to her room and threw herself upon her knees, helpless from the tide of anguish sweeping over her. Pride and anger had sustained her till beyond the sight of the trio. Now she recoiled from the blow she had received, with a low wail of intense agony. She had encountered her deadly foe, face to face. He was the dread and the bane of her life. He held ruin for her in his cruel hands. He too, was in *her* power. He would interpose her danger as a shield between them. He was a man, desperate, unprincipled. She a woman, weak and powerless. If there was war between them, might, not right would conquer. She knew that he

was afraid of her, and that he would not hesitate at any means to put her from his path. A dark cloud was over her head. She felt the icy chill of the storm already. Oh, when and where would it all end!

A little arm stole around her neck, a little hot face stained with tears of passionate grief, was laid against her own. The storm in the bosom of Agnes Montes, child though she was, was awful.

"Oh! dear, *dear* Mrs. Meredith! That man has foully belied you! I could murder him! Oh, I would laugh in joy this minute to trample his heart under my feet. He is blacker than sin. He is sin itself! They did not notice me. I heard it all, and I wanted to kill him then! I always said he was a bad man! He is a terrible man! Oh, the black, black slander! If I am a little girl, I know how dreadfully he injured you. I heard him tell Harry that you were no fit inmate for this house, and then he said you were parted from your husband, and he had saved you from want. He hinted other awful things, too, and I thought my brain would burst while he stood there and talked! Harry was white as death with passion, and I felt as if I could murder him too, and that other man! Oh, I knew that Guy Bartoni would bring a curse to this house and he *has* brought it!"

All this was uttered with a passionate vehemence and rapidity beyond description. Ora lifted her white face and gazed awe stricken upon the frail author of this terrible outburst. From the child's lips her fears were confirmed. His first step was an effort to blast her fair fame, and hurl her from his path by that

means. The frightful falsehood had been uttered. It would be believed. She was powerless to bring proof against it. Already shame was flowing in upon her life, and would soon overwhelm her. What mattered it "if she was innocent, if they *believed* her guilty." Her punishment would be the same. What mattered it then? Ah! much to her own pure soul! Nothing to the world, where there was a semblance of evil.

"God help me! God pity me!" she cried, and the little child gathered the white face against her bosom and the two sobbed together—prayed together till darkness had shrouded all things in a common mantle.

Then Ora shook off the torpor that was creeping over her, and resolutely roused herself to action. She had faith in Madeline's love, and perhaps the Dr. who had ever been so kind to her, would not wholly discredit the story he had heard from her lips in the beginning. She started up hopefully, with a wild impulse to go to them and appeal to their sense of justice against this wrong, but recoiled with a cry when she remembered that she would be appealing to them against a son—a lover. Would not the Dr's eyes look coldly upon her, while Madeline's lips would wreath in scorn and anger? Could they believe *her* before him? Too long, through motives of delicacy and fear, she had failed to warn the gentle girl against this villain, hearing her story of love, seeing it go on day after day, and week after week in silence. *Now* they would deem it a fabrication raised up in self defense. Their incredulous scorn

would kill her! She dared not go to them now! Too late she saw the fatal mistake, and must bear the consequences of her folly.

Another wild whirl of passionate feeling seized her. She could not bear companionship in such a painful state of mind, and calming herself with a mighty effort, she kissed her little child friend tenderly, fervently, and sent her from her.

"Go darling," she said. "To me your sympathy is precious as life itself, for it is all I have in my sorrow; but it is wrong for me to let you suffer so for my sake. Don't be so distressed, Aggie. God will help me where He sees me so wronged and friendless! Go, my pet!"

"Oh, please don't send me away," begged the little creature. "It kills me to think of you all alone here, crying and suffering without anybody! I don't care what they say! I do love you! I *will* love you better than anything in the world! Oh, let me stay with you! you will feel better if you let me put my arms around your neck and stay by you; for then you'll *feel* how I love you, and won't be so lonely in your trouble? Oh, do let me stay!"

"Dear, blessed Aggie! Devoted friend! Thank God for this one, at least!" murmured Ora clasping the devoted girl in her arms.

"But, Agnes," she continued, "I must send you away, because it is better for us both."

"If you stay here to talk to me this way, and fondle over me, I shall never gain self control enough to meet with what may be yet to come. Go to your room and bathe this poor little hot face, and then kneel

down and pray God to aid us both. You may come to me again bye and bye."

Without another word, Agnes obeyed her teacher and quitted the room. All the whole force of her strong nature centered in her love for her governess. She would have died to serve her in her distress, and seeing how she might help her by submitting to her wishes, she no longer refused to go away, and passed out quietly, casting a wistful, lingering look of love upon the suffering face as she departed.

Buried in bitter reflections, poor Ora sat still and mute where Agnes had left her. She thought of nothing but her misery, heeded nothing, until a slight rustle at the door made her look up. A folded paper was slipped beneath and lay upon the carpet, and with a strange, sickening sensation of fear, she scarce knew why, she lifted it and went to the gas which she turned up as brightly as her eyes could bear in their weak state. Then she unfolded the sheet with trembling fingers. The writing was clear and bold, but hastily written as if under a sudden impulse. Her heart beat heavily, and her eyes grew wild as she read :

"Ora Meredith, this hour has revealed to me a future dark with utter misery. I have had my eyes opened to a truth of which, in my willful blindness, I never even dreamed. I never paused to ask myself why I loved to watch you in your quiet, queenly beauty, or followed you with my curious gaze, longing to get down amid the mysteries of your life. I loved to annoy you, and have used rudeness many times for that means. Nothing to me seemed so

grand as to see those blue eyes flash, and your slender form rise to a queenly dignity, while the steel-true spirit of the woman, caused ever sharp, yet faultless retorts to fall from your lips. Day after day I sought to *know* you, but you have ever held aloof—avoided me—now I feel, justly. I knew it then, but it only stimulated me the more. When Guy Bartoni came here on that evening when I used so gross an insult to wound your sensitive feelings, I knew that he was known to you, and I resolved to find out from him and you the secret of that knowledge. It has been a fixed purpose, whose accomplishment has sealed my doom, for in the hour that I learned your shame, I learned too, that I loved you, wildly, passionately, madly! God help me! I would give my life to undo what I have done. And yet, can you not refute this awful slander—for slander I would fain believe it. Come forward, and *prove* your innocence, for God's sake! Or give me the power to do it for you. Tell me that you are what you have seemed to us—a widow. Tell me that you have no husband living! Tell me where and when you saw this man, and though he were my own brother, I will go to the earth's end to prove your truth against him. I conjure you, by all you hold dear to you, to listen to me, and let me be your friend. Forgive me for the wild confusion of my love! I cannot help it! This hour has caused revolution in my whole life. Worthy or unworthy, it is centered in you!"

"Merciful God! *this* to follow! Oh, what will come next."

Sick, bewildered, she sank down, grasping the epis-

tle in cold, rigid fingers. She was stunned by this new phase of trouble. Was it only a fresh insult, intended as a final sting, to thus offer her his love, or rather to declare and thrust it upon her in her last extremity of sorrow? Or was he in earnest, and felt in reality, the desire to clear her fame from the foul aspersion? Any way, she could but take it as the last drop added to a bitter cup. Now, more than ever, it was beyond her reach to attempt exonerating herself. To tell them now, would appear a desire to clear herself for *his* sake. She dared not do it. There was but one course left her. She must go away from the house. This was no longer a place for her, even if they, in their generosity would allow her to remain. Her pride rose up with bitter rebellion at the thought of being *turned away* from this once peaceful haven. She felt overwhelmed with shame at the thought. An impulse to leave the place silently, quietly, before they had an opportunity to send her forth, seized her; but would this be better, to creep away like the guilty thing they deemed her, afraid to brave their just indignation? Here, pride again revolted. What could she do?

She was still undecided, and lost in perplexity, when Jenny brought Ada in to put her to bed. Before the girl, Ora strove hard to appear as usual. She could not bear that servants should see and comment upon her misery.

During the process of disrobing, little Ada's eyes rested wistfully upon her mother's face. When Jenny had robed her in her night dress, she sprang from her lap, and struggling with its long folds, reached her

mother's feet, where she sank on her knees, and lifted her little folded hands ready to say her nightly prayer.

Ora's tones faltered with intensity of feeling, as she repeated the simple, beautiful prayer which expresses all the human heart could ask for—"Our Father." The baby tones followed, clear and sweet in their infantile lisps, but the little petitioner did not rise when she had done. Her great eyes looked up eagerly in the troubled face above her.

"Mamma, may Ada pray herself?"

"Yes, darling. What does my little daughter want to pray for?" asked the mother surprised and serious.

The child again folded her hands and the long lashes veiled the blue eyes, while the sweet tones repeated earnestly:

"Oh Dod, bless my pretty mamma, and dont let anybody hurt her, or make her ky."

Mrs. Meredith caught the little creature to her bosom convulsively, thrilled to the heart by the baby prayer for protection. The eyes of love, even when understanding not, had penetrated the cloud that shrouded her life, and the pure little heart sent up its plea for the sunshine.

"Oh, surely," she breathed, "my Father, if Thou turnest from me, Thou canst not from this little babe."

At the usual hour Ora's tea came up to her room as if nothing had occurred. The boy said Miss Madeline had company to tea, and had sent up hers to her room, as she had said she preferred to take her meals alone when strangers were present.

Ora felt the intended kindness in the message, and her heart swelled gratefully. The words seemed to

convey a wish that she should attach no importance to the matter further than the words expressed. She had asked for permission to remain in her room except at such times as when the family were alone, and it was kindly, thoughtfully granted.

But another thought occurred to her after a little while. Perhaps Madeline had not as yet, learned what had occurred, and she was yet to feel her indignation. In that case, the hope that was again springing up in her heart, must die out. Ah! when will we cease to multiply trouble, and feeling our innocence rely upon a higher power to sustain us.

Madeline did not get an opportunity to go to Ora during the evening. Company came in to tea, and others arriving after, detained her till late. When she passed her door at last, all was quiet within, and she concluded to wait till morning before expressing the kind course they had decided to adopt toward her.

Filled with this purpose, she came out of her room early, and proceeded to that of the governess. When she reached it, she found it empty! Ora was gone!

CHAPTER XI.

SIX YEARS previous to the commencement of our story, a beautiful little cottage was reared in one of the loveliest portions of the Old Dominion. It stood upon a little knoll, thickly carpeted with green grass, and sloping away gently to the edge of the beautiful stream, that wound in and out among the lofty hills, glittering and flashing in the bright sunshine, like a stream of molten silver.

There was a rare collection of shrubbery in the yard and garden, and woodbines, eglantines and sweet honey-suckles clambered in wild luxuriance over the windows and portico. Two large elms, standing at each end of the cottage, reached out their giant branches, and locked themselves in an almost impenetrable mass over the roof; and the wide-spreading willows in front drooped lovingly over it, as if to shelter it from every rude breath. The neat little palings surrounding the yard, were overshadowed by a thick border of sugar-maple and locusts, and, so entirely excluding the cottage from view, that it was impossible to catch a glimpse of the spotless walls until you had opened the little gate and begun to ascend the broad graveled walk.

In the borders, flowers of every description bloomed profusely. Roses of every kind filled the air with their rich fragrance, and the beautiful meek-eyed

violets peeped shyly out from some luxuriant mass of summer chrysanthemums, and starry pinks. Here a coral honey-suckle climbed gracefully over the white, delicate frame-work that supported it; there a sweet-brier shook off its fragrance on the balmy breeze. Bright, orange-colored crocuses nodded here and there, beautifully contrasted with the dense masses of mint, and geraniums, that lifted their scarlet heads proudly, vying with the queen of flowers in their stateliness. The whole presented a scene too gorgeously beautiful for description; and this was more like an Eden, where Edward Piercelie had brought his child-like, beautiful bride, than a place where sorrow might glide in with her stealthy step, and lay a blighting hand upon the happy hearts of those two loving creatures.

Edward Piercelie was the only son of a country clergyman, and the heir to a handsome estate. His father had taken great pains with his education, and at the age of twenty-one, he graduated with the proudest honor that heart could wish, and returned home to his parents, where he was, as he had ever been, the pet and idol of his father's household.

Once, when Edward returned home at vacation, he found a fair, delicate little girl an inmate of his home.

She was an orphan, whose parents had died directly after landing in the States, leaving her alone, destitute among strangers. Mr. Piercelie, whose heart ached for the situation of the little stranger, took her to his home, and cared for her, as though she had been his own. Thus years passed away, and the

delicate child grew up, under the tender care bestowed upon her, to be a beautiful woman.

Edward had, however, paid very little attention to the little stranger until his last vacation, when, struck with her wondrous beauty, he suddenly changed his indifferent manner, and became as tender and devoted as he had previously been careless and cool; and when he at last departed for his last term in college, the gentle girl clung to him, and wept as though her heart would break, while he, scarcely less moved, tried to sooth her with assurances of lasting affection, and promises to return and claim her as his bride.

Time passed slowly away, and summer merged into autumn, autumn to winter, and winter to spring, ere the son returned again to his father's hearthstone; and then the joy he felt at meeting was soon changed to sorrow, for his parents were stricken down with a malignant fever, and died within three days of each other.

Then the two orphans stood alone. Neither could claim a kindred tie on earth, and their desolation and frightful bereavement but served to cement the bonds of their plighted affections.

Standing alone, beside the corpse of their almost idolized father and guardian, after the mother's funeral, the two had gazed mournfully upon the dead, and then lifted their eyes to each other's faces, and in that mute glance, then said, plainly as words could have spoken: "We are alone, now—all that is left of a once happy circle!" and stretching forth their hands simultaneously, they met in a close clasp with the simple utterance of a name.

“Nina.”

“Edward.”

And thus were they pledged; with only the eyes of God, and the presence of the dead for witnesses to their solemn plighting.

Two months afterwards, they were married, and removed to the beautiful little cottage before described, leaving the parsonage vacant, for the reception of the new minister, who had been chosen to fill the place of the dead.

And here, in this quiet spot, surrounded by the rarest beauties fashioned by the hand of nature, they found but one drawback to their happiness, and that was regret for those who had, in their first flush of youthful joy, been removed from the path which they had so fondly hoped in future to make bright for them.

But as the time passed away, they forgot, in a measure, their loss, in the joys that crowded upon them, and with health, beauty, luxury and the innocent prattle of the little one who came to gladden their hearts, they were as happy as it is possible for creatures of earth to be.

But there are serpents, who are ever on the alert to enter the Eden bowers, and beguile the inmates to sin and sorrow, and theirs was not an exception to the baneful influence of the wily reptile.

One evening, Edward, upon returning home from town, threw into his wife's lap a dainty billet, saying, gaily—

“There, little one, is an agreeable surprise for you.”

“What is it, Edward!”

"Read it for yourself," retorted her husband, pleasantly.

Mrs. Piercelie opened it, and with a smile, ran her eyes down the page.

"Why, Edward!" she said, surprised, "I never knew that you had a cousin living—I thought you had not a relative in the world."

"Faith! and so did I, yet it seems that I have, and a beautiful one, too, if, as she asserts, she is the young lady whom I met at Mrs. Porter's during my college term. But it puzzles me that she did not discover the relationship existing between us, then. However, I suppose she has just found it out, and as it is more charming to have a pleasant trip out in the country just now, she will presume upon it to spend a few weeks with us at our 'delightful country seat.'"

"Why, dear," exclaimed Nina, in surprise, "how sarcastic you are. I hope you are not displeased with this contemplated visit?"

"Not displeased, darling," returned Edward, encircling his wife's waist with his arm, and gently drawing the shower of shining brown curls upon his shoulder. "But it is so annoying to have our happy quiet broken in upon. I feel as if I could be forever contented here, alone with my two treasures, and I fear, when once disturbed, all will not seem the same as it did before."

"Well, Edward, if you don't want her to come, I'm sure you might put her off some way."

"No, no! That will never do," he returned, quickly.

"Besides I cannot think of keeping my little bird caged up forever, alone. If she never has com-

panions of her own age to warble with her, I fear she may grow weary of her confinement."

"Oh, Edward!" she answered, reproachfully, "how could you say so! Was I ever so happy in my life as I have been here, with none but yourself and our little one and servants. I ask for nothing upon the earth but that God will grant us the peace and happiness that has hitherto been ours." And the sweet, dear eyes were raised lovingly and confidently to her husband's face.

"God bless you, love," he returned, kissing the white brow. "And may our future be as happy as the past has been. But Alice Murray must come, I suppose," he added, after a pause. "We cannot put her off easily, and it is all foolishness in me about her leaving a cloud behind her, as I have fancied she would, ever since I read that letter."

"How singular," said Nina, thoughtfully. "I cannot see how she could in any way disturb us. At least it would be but a ripple upon the clear surface of the stream, that would leave no trace when it should have passed away. Who could possess the power to mar our happiness so long as we are secure of each other's love."

"No one, my pet," returned Edward, fondly, "and we will dismiss all fears."

"*We!* Who entertained any but yourself," retorted his wife, playfully. "For my part, I think it will be very nice to have a beautiful, accomplished 'city cousin' visit us in our rural cottage. It will be something so new to entertain a permanent guest. And then," she rattled on joyously, "won't we have her so

in love with our country life, that she will never want to go back to the hot, dusty city again! Of cool, sweet evenings we will all walk out, and stroll along the river banks, or climb the cliff, to catch a glimpse of the magnificent scenery beyond. We will also have books and music to while away the hours, which will be all too fleeting, so laden will they be with happiness. Then, of mornings, when I shall be too busy to leave home, you shall take her out riding—put her on my beautiful little Snow-flake, and I will stay here to prepare something for your dinner. Let me see! You shall have fine turtle soup, vegetables, roast chicken and turkey, and nice cakes, strawberries and cream, such as she has never seen in the city. And then, oh! won't I make her stare, with the fresh fragrant prints of golden butter, the nice fresh eggs, and cold milk, richer and sweeter than she has ever tasted. Oh, Edward, she must come!"

"And so she shall, little pet," returned Mr. Piercelie.

"We'll write to her at once."

"There!—that's your own dear self again; and I'll show you how happy we shall all be!"

"And shan't you feel lonely when she is gone?"

"No indeed, I'll have so much to do to keep things in order, and prepare for the winter. You know by the time she goes away, I'll have to begin packing away butter, eggs and pickles; and there will be the blackberries, quinces, grapes, damsons, and peaches to preserve. I'll have no time to feel lonely and discontented. Besides, this fairy cot, where I have ever been so blessed and happy, can never be anything but pleasant and attractive to me, come what may."

“God grant it,” was the fervent response. “Like the enlightened bard, I think ‘there’s no place like home;’ and I should grow inexpressibly sad to see my little wife becoming discontented with it.”

“No fear of that, dear Edward. I could not be happy out of my sweet little home-circle, and as long as I possess my husband’s love, I shall never desire to leave it.”

The words were earnest and simple; but, in after years, Edward Piercelie remembered them, with agony and remorse tugging at his heart-strings; and he would have given his life, twice over, had he possessed the power to recall those years, and again live over that happy period.



CHAPTER XII.

ALICE MURRAY came to Rose Cottage in the first flush of June, just when the golden harvests were ripening for the scythe, and the scarlet cherries hung in gorgeous masses from drooping boughs. Professing to yield herself up entirely to the ease and freedom of country life, she ran hither and thither, like a wild thing, stopping but an instant in one place, where, like a little humming bird, she fluttered a moment over some rare plant or dainty flower, then away again, like a flash of light, while Nina and her husband followed laughingly.

They felt more at ease with the gay girl, than they had expected to feel; and the bright, laughing face of their guest and cousin, came, like a flash of sunlight, into the little cottage.

Alice was tall and slender, with eyes and hair as black as the raven's wing. Her head was small, finely formed, and she wore her hair about her neck in shining coils, which gave a singular expression to her elfish face. Her cheeks wore the brilliant tint of the carnation, and the small, pearl-like teeth gleamed brightly within the scarlet, proudly curved lips that were perpetually wreathed in a smile, which was peculiar to herself. Evening after evening found them rambling on the river banks, or scaling some rugged height, till Nina, at last, laughingly, declared, they would either get drowned, or fall from some frightful precipice and break their necks; or meet a worse fate, from her sad inattention to her house-keeping—starve to death; and, assuring them of her unwillingness to curtail their pleasure, bade them go without her.

At first they protested strongly against this, but Nina gaily resisted their entreaties to accompany them every day; and each evening saw the cousins strolling over the beautiful grounds, or mounted upon the spirited horses, of which Edward was so justly proud, flying over the valleys, more like Indians than civilized people.

And Nina, glancing now and then from a door or window, as she glided swiftly about, engaged in household duties, would smile brightly at the thought of their pleasure, and then away, with swift and skil-

ful fingers, preparing some dainty luxury to refresh them upon their return.

Thus weeks passed away, and a cloud began to darken the brightness of their, hitherto, uninterrupted happiness. Nina was no longer urged to accompany them in their walks or rides, but seemed to be wholly forgotten.

And then the cheeks of the young wife began to pale, and the head to droop mournfully, as the conviction that she was neglected forced itself upon her mind. She struggled hard to repel it, and to excuse them on the grounds of having herself urged them to go without her; but she did not expect, when doing this, that she was to be entirely dropped off, and left alone, day after day, while they walked, rode or visited some fall, cliff or ruin, to while away the long summer hours, which began to drag heavily with the young wife.

Aunt Sue, the old cook, had observed the change in her young mistress, and her honest old heart was grieved and indignant at its cause.

One morning Nina was giving her some directions about dinner, while busily picking over some currants, when she observed, abruptly:

"Miss Nina, Marse Edward an' Miss Murray take heap o' rides an' walks lately."

"Yes," returned Nina, absently; "they seem to be enjoying themselves."

"What for you neber go too?" asked Sue, with a sidelong glance at her mistress.

"Oh, I can't spare the time to go as often as they do, and should not feel like going if I could."

"Well, Miss Nina," returned the old negress, working away vigorously at her batch of wheat dough; "you can do jis' as you pleases, but if I was in your place, I should not 'low a husband of mine to go galantin' a young girl roun', and never noticin' me once, to the scandal of the whole country."

Nina's lips blanched.

"Why, Sue, people don't talk about it, do they?"

"'Deed dey does! Didn't I hear Miss Wilson whisper to Miss Jenkins last Sunday, comin' out ob de church, jis' to look how dewoted Mr. Piercelie was to his cousin, while his poor wife was at home pinin' her life away wid neglect! I tell you, Miss Nina, dese works shouldn't go on any longer! I'd put a stop to dem, dat I would!" and she stepped back, with a flourish of indignation, and began vigorously wiping the perspiration from her ebony visage.

"Oh!" said Nina, with lips that grew whiter and whiter each moment; "this is too much! But are you certain, Sue, that you were not mistaken?"

"Mistaken!" indignantly replied Aunt Sue; "you tink, mistiss, dat I can't believe my own ears? Min' dis, I knows dat people hab more room to talk dan you eber dreams ob; my own eyes seed enough las' night to convince me."

"What did you see, Sue?" asked Nina, trembling in every limb. But Sue shook her head mysteriously.

"You's unhappy nuff, Miss Nina, 'thout me doin' more to make you feel wuss. Ise fraid Ise done said too much already."

"Too much for you to be silent now, and not

enough to satisfy me. I must know what you saw," repeated Nina, with a determined air.

"Well, mistiss," coming up close to her, and rubbing the dough off one hand with the other, "las' night I went out, jist after supper, an' who dus I see in de garden but Miss Alice an' Marse Edward. De moon was shinin' light as day, and dey was talkin' low like, so I couldn't hear what dey said, but I saw him put his arm roun' her, and kiss her. Now, Miss Nina, what you think ob dat ar; ain't I right in sayin' I'd put a stop to dese sort ob work?"

"Susan, never let me hear of your watching your master in this manner again—nor any one. He may do as he pleases, but you shall not be a spy upon his actions; understand this."

"Laws! Missis, I didn't mean no harm by it," cried Sue, in dismay. "I jis——"

"No matter," interrupted Nina, "it was very wrong, and you must never be guilty of such an action again."

With these words, she rose and set her pan of currants upon the table, and left the kitchen. The parlor was deserted, and she threw herself, with her face upon the pillows, upon the lounge, and burst into an irresistible fit of tears.

"Oh!" she murmured chokingly, "if I only dreamed that he had ceased to love me—that another usurped my place in his heart—it would kill me." And then she lay a long time, weeping and indulging unhappy thoughts, shut up in that little room, where, for years, she had been so happy.

Edward and Alice had gone out riding, and did not return till late, and Alice went directly to her

room, to change her dress for tea. Nina was busy with tea, and Edward, in an absent, preoccupied manner, threw himself upon the sofa, whistling softly, like one engaged in deep thought. He never once seemed to notice his wife, who glided so silently about the snowy tea-table, arranging the rich fruits and cakes her hands had culled and prepared to tempt his appetite. And poor Nina felt this keenly; but she was a brave, true woman, and struggled hard against the tears which rose threateningly, as she strove to ask in a cheerful manner:

“Did you have a pleasant ride, Edward?”

“Very!”

And he continued whistling. He did not look up, with the bright, fond smile he was wont to bestow upon her, and the young wife felt her heart swell almost to bursting, at the tone and manner.

“What! not tired!” cried a clear, ringing voice in the doorway, and Alice glided in, in her radiant beauty—her face all aglow with brilliant smiles.

“Oh, no,” he exclaimed, springing up and leading her to a seat. “Only lazy; and you, I see, are more bright and full of spirit than ever, after our long jaunt. By the way, are you not hungry?”

“A little. But, in my enjoyment, I forgot that we went away before dinner.”

“So did I, till I caught the scent of that delicious tea, and that reminded me that I am wofully hungry. Nina, is it ready?”

“Yes, I have been waiting till Alice should come down,” replied Nina, gently, and moving to her place, as she spoke; but her hand shook so, as she handed

the cup, that she almost burned Edward's fingers, which drew from him an exclamation of reproach :

"Why, Nina, how awkward you are! What is the matter with you, to-night?"

"I am not very well," she replied, striving hard to keep back the tears. "I have a bad headache."

"Then why didn't you go to your room, and leave Jane to wait on us? She could have done as well."

"But I did not like to leave her to do it, knowing how you have always insisted upon my pouring your tea."

Mr. Piercelie took no notice of the remark, and, turning to Alice, entered into an animated conversation upon the beauties of the scenes they had visited that day, while that poor pale-faced woman, with a crushed and agonized heart, sat quietly listening, and struggling bravely with the emotions that almost overwhelmed her in their fearful strife.

After tea, the two, still engaged in lively conversation, took chairs out upon the piazza, while Nina superintended the clearing away of the tea-things; and then, with an aching head and breaking heart, the young wife sought her room, and threw herself, without undressing, upon the bed.

That was a fearful hour for Nina Piercelie, and she shrank from its torture as a poor criminal shrinks from the blow of the axe that is to put an end to every earthly hope and aspiration. There were no tears now; only great drops of perspiration beaded the white brow, and rolled slowly off upon the pillow, drenching it as with the clammy dews of death, while every limb quivered, as if in the last agony. She

had twined her heart strings about that one loved being, as closely as the clinging vine wraps its tendrils about the branches of a tree; and now that the tree was falling, she could feel the silken fibers snapping, slowly, one by one, and life itself seemed going out, in the awful struggle.

Thus the hours passed and the deep hush of night was over the earth. The silence grew oppressive, for nothing but the wild beating of her own heart, and the gentle, regular respiration of her child, broke the profound stillness. Every vein seemed swollen with a tide of molten lead, and her temples throbbed, to bursting, with a burning pain. It was more than she could bear, and, with a stifled scream of agony, Mrs. Piercelie sprang from her couch, and hastened down stairs.

Her design was to procure something with which to bathe her throbbing temples, and she hurried on, forgetful and heedless alike of everything except the fearful pain that was maddening her.

Scarcely knowing what she did, she opened the front door, and passed out noiselessly, taking her way through a side-gate, down to the little meadow, where a cool spring bubbled up amid the violets. She did not heed the heavy dew in the long grass, that drenched her garments almost to her waist, but almost flew over the intervening space, and knelt beside the little spring, dashing the cool, bright waters over her fevered brow. It stilled the wild throbbing, and the low, unceasing bubbling and murmur of the waters soothed her disordered nerves, more than aught else could have done, and, grateful for

the relief she had found, she laid her cheek down upon the wet grass, and wept—wept such tears as give relief to an overburdened heart; while the stars looked calmly down upon her, and the moon sailed on as brightly through her azure course, as though no cloud had ever darkened its lustre.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE little clock upon the mantel chimed the hour of twelve, as Nina glided again into the cottage, and she was about to ascend to her room, when the low hum of voices fell upon her ear. The parlor door stood open, and a single stream of moonlight fell directly upon the sofa, where sat Edward and Alice. Nina shook violently; but a spell riveted her to the spot, and, in the deep stillness, every word that was uttered she heard as distinctly as though it had been spoken in her very ear.

There were low words of tenderness, and vows of eternal affection interchanged, and the young wife seemed congealing into stone, as she heard one, who had solemnly promised, before God's altar, to love, cherish and protect her through life, breathing in another's ear more passionate words of love than she—his wife—had ever heard him utter. Then, to some of his fond assurances, the low voice of the syren came in reply:

"And Nina, your wife, what is to become of her?"

"Nina! Oh, Alice, do not speak to me of her now!" was the quick reply. "I am sorry for her, poor child, but I cannot help it. She is not capable of bestowing upon me the great love with which you can enrich my life. She is only a simple, silly child, and *you* are a grand, beautiful woman. I never loved her—I knew not the true meaning of the word love till I beheld you, Alice, my own! my beautiful!"

Oh, God! this, then, was the reward for years of devotion and almost blind idolatry! She had poured out her wealth of treasure at his feet, and he trampled upon it as nought but dust. Her brain reeled, and she was unable to move from the spot; but she did not faint or utter the least cry. Agony and despair gave her strength, and she battled bravely with her weakness.

She had heard enough! Her husband no longer loved her—had never loved her, according to his own words—and the poor, broken-hearted wife looked forth into the future, as the weary traveler gazes far out upon a barren waste where he is compelled to go, but which will afford neither food nor drink to appease his gnawing hunger, or quench the raging thirst that consumes him.

With a violent effort, Nina shook off the awful lethargy that was beginning to steal over her, and darted quickly up the stairs. In a moment's time she had decided upon her course; and now, action alone remained for her. She did not pause or falter now. Strong in the intensity of her despair, she heeded

nothing but what she had to do. She lighted a lamp and going to the wardrobe, took down a black dress, which she hastily donned, and then, collecting a few of her most valuable articles, and packing a change of apparel for herself and child, in a small satchel, she threw on her cloak and advanced to the little crib, where the child was so sweetly sleeping.

She bent over her a moment, as if engaged in prayer, and the bright tears fell fast upon the little one's shining curls; but the babe slept on unconscious of sorrow and suffering.

At last the mother rose and lifted the little one gently from the crib, and folded a warm cloak about the tiny form; then putting on her own hood, and taking the sachel in one hand, she made her way noiselessly down the front stairway, and cautiously opening the door, passed out of the cottage. She heard the low murmur of voices still in the parlor, as she passed under the window, and her heart almost stilled as the sound of that loved one fell, perhaps for the last time, upon her ear; but she glided swiftly on, and passed out of the little gate into the open highway.

One moment she paused upon a little knoll, and gazed wistfully upon the cottage, where she had known so much happiness, and the tears rained over her cheeks, she murmured a farewell to the scenes she had so much loved, and the sobs came thick and fast, when she turned away, murmuring—

“Oh, Edward! Alice! God pity and forgive you.”

The following morning, when, surprised at his wife's non-appearance, Edward Piercelie sought her room,

he found that mother and child had both gone, no one knew whither.

From that hour, Edward Piercelie was a wretched, remorse-stricken man. Then the scales fell from his eyes, and the syren's chains no longer enfettered him, and he saw how cruelly unjust he had been to one, who, though scorned and wronged, was yet too pure and noble minded to reproach him for his baseness.

Poor old Sue lamented, loudly, her mistress' loss, and openly, and with the warmest indignation, charged her master and Alice Murray with breaking her heart, and driving her forth from home, alone to wander among strangers—perhaps to die of want—a charge which one received with humility—the other, with rage.

“Will you sit here, and thus permit your own servant to abuse us, Edward?” she asked passionately, as Sue's indignant accusations poured forth in a torrent.

He did not reply, and Alice rose to her feet, trembling in every limb.

“Leave the room,” she commanded, angrily. “How dare you utter such words as you have done, to my face!”

“Because dey's de truf, an' ye can't deny it. You's not only broke my poor, dear Missis' heart, but you's made yourselves de by-words of de whole country.”

“It is false!” cried Alice, passionately. “A falsehood of your own coinage? No one would dare to utter a word against my fair fame, because I accompanied my cousin in his rides.”

“Maybe dey wouldn't, if you'd a had dat cousin's

wife along wid you, or even a gone only 'casionally; but ye went ebry day, from mornin' till night, an' she sat here alone, or worked her finger nails off for you, blisterin' her sweet face an' hands by de fire, to make yot a nice cake or pie, while you was disgracin' her and yerselves, an' breakin' her heart."

"Great God! Edward, will you permit that creature to go on thus?" and Alice's face was white as a sheet, with passion.

"We deserve it," he said, humbly. "How can we deny her accusations, when we know and feel their justness? Oh, Alice, how blind we have been! But I can see it all now! Oh, Nina, Nina, my poor injured wife!" He sank back upon the sofa, and the proud girl stamped her foot impatiently upon the floor.

"Leave the room, I say!" and she hurled a book at her, with such force that, in dodging it, it missed Sue's head, and shattered a large mirror, near which she stood, into a thousand pieces. Seeing the old negress still disposed to disobey her, she seized a chair, and would have hurled that, also, but Sue, seeing the danger, and really terrified at the fiendish expression of her face, hastily left the room, muttering bitter anathemas against them both.

"Neber mine," she said, closing the door behind her. "Ye'll repent this, sometime, and, when ye'r on yer dyin' bed, hated and despised by everybody, ye'll be sorry for the misery ye've made for one whose greatest fault was to heap kindness on you, when she ought to kicked ye, like a dog, from her door," and Sue was gone.

Alice turned to Edward Piercelie.

"This weakness surprises me, Edward. Have you gone mad, that you can hear yourself and me insulted, in this manner, and not use your authority to prevent and punish such insolence? If that negro belonged to me, I would whip her within an inch of her life for this."

"I will not!" said Edward, rising and pacing the floor. "She is the only one who cared for, while we blindly wronged and neglected her. Oh, Alice, you ask me if I have gone mad, and I would give worlds if I could only answer 'yes,' and feel that all this injury, inflicted upon that pure, angelic girl, was but a freak of madness, on my part, and not blind, deliberate cruelty!"

"Poor weak fool!" sneered Alice, whose anger deprived her of her prudence. "How long is it since you confessed to me that you had never loved the woman whom you foolishly made your wife?"

All the fire and resentment of Mr. Piercelie's nature was roused at her tone and sneer, and a fierce quarrel ensued, and, on the same day, Alice Murray, disgraced, and smarting under the disappointment and overthrow of all the schemes she had built up, left Rose Cottage to return to Richmond. Then, without delay, Edward Piercelie departed in search of his lost wife.

But this was no easy matter, for he had no clue to the direction she had taken, and she had left no word or line by which he might be guided. He made inquiries in every direction, but no one had seen such a

person as he described, and weeks and months passed away in fruitless wandering.

Old Sue was disconsolate, and declared she knew her poor Missis had drowned herself in the river; and as the time passed on, without any more success than had attended him through his fruitless inquiries, Edward began to fear that her surmises were true, and Nina had indeed put an end to a miserable existence.

Then the little cottage was deserted, and Edward Piercelie became a wanderer. But how different from the gentle being, whom his inconstancy had driven from him. Both had gone forth, it is true, with sorrow and agony at their hearts; but one bore a consciousness of having done her duty, so far as possible, as a true wife, while the other was stung with remorse and shame, for his cruelty and injustice.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUT once more, alone and friendless, in the uncharitable world. But again with shame and indignation in her heart, and a fire in her brain that robbed her of reason. She had taken up her child at midnight, and stolen forth into the street, intent alone upon one thought—escape. She wanted to flee from Harry's love, from Madeline's hate, from Dr. Clifton's anger. Too much had been crowded upon the poor woman in

her physical weakness. A fit of mental aberration was the result, in which she went out from amongst her friends, and took her lonely way toward a distant part of the city.

On and on, she wandered, scarcely feeling the weight of the little form which at another time, she could not have carried.

At last she came to the Battery, and there sinking in a friendly shadow, bowed her head over the child, who at length had closed her eyes with weariness after a season of quiet wonder at the strange proceedings of the mother.

What passed through her mind during the remaining hours of night, was the wild thought of a maniac, and bears no record. She must have slept, at length. When the day dawned, restored to consciousness, she gazed around her in blank dismay, striving vainly to account for her presence in such a place.

The hum of life was rising deeper and deeper abroad. Wheels rattled over the stones, and horses feet pattering before them, chimed in harshly with the rough jar. There were sounds of footsteps upon the pavements, and every where, indications of re-awakened life.

Weak, trembling, perplexed, Ora rose and walked away with her now almost insupportable burden. This could not last long. A temporary place of rest must be found, where she could reflect what was to be done.

She was not long in finding a second class boarding house, where she resolved for the present to seek shelter. She reflected that here she would be more secure

from observation and curiosity than amongst a higher class of people, and though her thoughts turned in disgust from its coarse appointments and associations, she felt that she must sooner or later accustom herself to adapt herself to circumstances. Misfortune was pursuing her relentlessly. To what might it not drive her in the end?

She rapped at the door, which was opened, and a shabby girl showed her into what she termed a parlor, but which was in reality, a most miserable excuse for a common sitting and dining room combined. She stated her business briefly.

The landlady was a widow; a little, sharp, parchment-visaged woman, with small, glittering black eyes, and a cunning, disagreeable expression of countenance, that Ora did not like; but she reflected that she knew nothing of the woman, and she might be much better in heart than her face indicated; and, at most, if it should prove otherwise, she would only remain a day or two, perhaps, and, if she should display an inclination to annoy her, she could easily seek other quarters.

"I s'pose," said the woman, eyeing her keenly, as she took a seat and lifted Ada to her lap, "that you can pay your board in advancê? It takes money to buy food, and I can't supply my boarders with necessary articles, unless they give me the means beforehand to do it."

"I will pay you now for one day and night. After that I may go away. But if I remain longer, I will pay you punctually every morning."

"Well, you can do as you like, but if you're in

search of work, I'll warrant you don't get a place inside of a week, and you'd just as well pay me for a week in advance, and have the trouble off your hands, at once. What are you goin' to do?"

"I cannot tell. I shall probably get a situation as governess, somewhere."

The woman shook her head positively.

"Can't do it. People don't get governesses for their children now-a-days. Just as quick as they're out of the cradle they sends them whoppin' off to boardin' school, and keeps them there till they're fifteen or sixteen, and then they brings them out and marry's them right off. No use for governesses, you see."

Ora smiled, in spite of herself, at this, and replied, with an effort to be grave:

"I presume governesses are not wholly excluded. At least I have just left a place where I held such an office."

"What made you leave? Was it a nice place?"

"Very nice," said Ora, replying to the last question, and taking no notice of the first.

"They gave you good wages, I reckon?" glancing at her neat black silk, and the child's tastefully embroidered frock.

"Very good," returned Ora, quietly.

"Many children?"

"Three."

"How long had you been there?"

"Three months."

"The children had got through, I s'pose, with their studies?"

"No."

"Then, what made you leave such a nice place? I reckon, though, you had some difficulty with them."

"No. Circumstances, which could not interest you, caused me to leave," answered Mrs. Meredith, wearied with the woman's inquisitiveness, and fearing for the length of the interview.

"But I am worn and tired, and would be glad to go to my room, if you will be so good as to show me to it," she continued, rising.

"Oh, sit down. I'll have to have one fixed up a little for you first, and you can just lay your little girl on the lounge there, while I have something brought in for you to eat."

Mrs. Meredith sank back, wearily, and the woman left the room. She felt that she had not chosen the best of boarding-houses, as she glanced around the little apartment, filled with greasy, shabby furniture. She shuddered, as she laid Ada's little head upon the soiled pillow of the lounge; but her arms ached with her weight, and through trouble and exhaustion, she felt as though she would faint.

In a short time the woman returned with a cup of tea, and a dry, hard looking piece of brown bread. Ora turned from it in disgust.

"You'd better drink it," urged the woman. "There's nothing half so strengthening as a good cup of tea. It refreshes one amazingly. Drink it, do."

"No, thank you, I cannot," replied Ora, "I only need rest to refresh me. If you can have a nice piece of toast and a cup of strong tea for me by dinner time, I think I may feel more like eating."

"Well, just as you like," returned her hostess, in a

tone that savored of displeasure. "But I thought you might feel faint, and a good cup of tea would do you good."

"I'm sure I thank you kindly, for your thoughtful attention, and am sorry for the trouble you have had to get it, since I have no appetite for it."

Mrs. Meredith's manner was so gentle, while uttering these words, and her face shone so full of touching sadness, that the woman forgot her displeasure at once, in contemplating the beautiful but sorrow-stricken woman before her.

Her next words, however, proved that her inquisitive propensities predominated over her sympathies.

"You've been married, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Ora, with a slight start.

"How long?"

"Six years."

"Six years!" Why, bless my soul, you must have been almost a baby six years ago, from your looks now!"

"I was fifteen," said Ora, with a faint smile at the woman's astonishment.

"Fifteen! Well, that's a heap too young to marry. You ought to have stayed at home with your mother a while longer, and then there'd been plenty time to see trouble."

"Alas!" replied the lady sadly, "I had neither father nor mother. I was an orphan."

"How long have they been dead?"

"I was but ten when they died."

"Poor thing!" with a touch of pity. "An orphan at ten, and a widow at twenty-one! Well, well.

Trouble comes to all of us. I lost my poor, dear husband, Mr. Ichabod Jenkins, this ten years ago, and I've had to scuffle mighty hard to git along, but some way I always done it. I aint like some people, who set down and cry, with their hands lyin' idle in their laps, when trouble comes. I know I loved my poor old man jist as well as any woman ever could; but when God saw fit to take him from me, I said 'God's will be done,' for, surely, if He deprives me of one, He will, in His mercy, send another to comfort me; and so I've managed to git along this far, and am waiting patiently for the protector. I feel He will not fail to send one to me."

"Now," she continued, settling herself comfortably in her arm chair, and taking up a blue stocking, whose color could scarcely be discerned for dust and grease, "If I was to marry a hundred times, I'd never git sich another man as Mr. Jenkins was, 'cept by the rarest chance. While he lived, I always had some one to work for me, and keep me in plenty; while, at the same time, I always had my own way about everything. I've always thought a woman knowed better how to manage things than men. They git along so much nicer with everything. Men are such great gawky, awkward things, generally, they do nothing but blotch and blunder if it wasn't for the women. I've told my poor, dear Jenkins many and many's the time, that he would starve to death if it wasn't for me, to tell and direct him about everything, and he was smart and sensible enough to see the truth of it."

Ora saw that Mrs. Jenkins was disposed to be communicative, but it was more agreeable than being

questioned, and she suffered her to go on without interruption. Sitting with her face to the window, where she could look out upon the street, and watch the throng as it surged on, she almost forgot her, indeed; and it was only the incessant hum of her voice that kept her cognizant of her presence.

"But you know," resumed Mrs. Jenkins, "that it's a hard thing to lose a good, kind husband; and more especially when he's descended from one of the first families in the old country. Yes, Jenkins was one of the proudest names that graced the annals of the whole united continent. No man could boast of a prouder, than my poor lost Ichabod."

"He was borned and raised on the land of a real lord—Lord Wentworth, of England—and was raised in the first style. When he was only fourteen, he served as a sort of valet to young master Wentworth, and after he had grown up to be a man, became head valet—that was after his old master died, and master Fredric fell heir to the estate—and I'm sure, Lord Fredric thought the world and all of him.

"But some people say somebody they call Fortune, 'is a fickle jade,' and I s'pose it's so, for my poor, dear Ichabod didn't keep his place long after his old master died. Lord Fredric Wentworth came home one morning, after a night spent in carousal, and found his handsomest diamond ring was missing; and somehow it happened that the worst suspicions fell on my poor husband, and he was searched, and not having the stolen ring about him, they had his trunk searched, and there it was, sure enough, where somebody had put it, no doubt, to get my husband locked up in jail,

through motives of revenge. At any rate, I always thought so, and I had the best of reasons: for a young man I knew, one of the lower servants, had had a grudge against him ever since he married me, which was just about two weeks before Lord Wentworth died.

"He had begged me to have him again and again, on his very knees, but I always wouldn't. I had done surrendered all the great wealth of my spotless affections to my Ichabod, and there wasn't no room in my heart for even the shadow of another's image.

"So, as I said, I always thought he put that ring there, just through pure revenge, and he might a thought if he could once get Ichabod out of the way, he'd maybe get a chance to carry me off by main force. However, be that as it may, my poor husband was sent off to prison, and I thought I should go crazy when they took him from me. Oh, that was a sad, sad time, but 'the darkest hour come jist before day,' you know, and one morning who should come into my room, jist as it was beginning to get light, but Ichabod himself, creeping on tiptoe and looking skeered half to death.

" 'Betty,' said he, in a quick whisper—

" 'What do you want, Ichobod?' says I.

" 'Git up and dress,' says he. 'I am going away, and want you to go with me.'

" 'Why, where are you going?' says I, in surprise.

" 'To America,' says he.

" 'To America,' says I. 'What! away across the ocean?'

" 'Yes,' says he. 'Make haste, or we'll be too late for the ship that's going out.'

“ ‘ But, Ichabod, I don’t want to go,’ says I. ‘ What are you going there for?’

“ ‘ Listen, Betty,’ says he, bending down close to my ear, ‘ I’ve jist escaped from jail, and I won’t be put back there again for stealing a thing I never saw; and I’m going to leave these cursed wretches, and go where gentlemen are treated like gentlemen. Now, Betty, you know how I’ve always loved you better than anybody in the world, and if you have the least bit of love for me you’ll be quiet, and git up at once and go along with me.’

“ I could’nt stand it when he talked so affectionate to me, and I got right up, without another word, and gathered up my things and followed him to the ship, where we took passage for America, and we came right here, where we lived ever since, till, poor, dear Ichabod died, and left me a poor lone widow, without anybody in the wide world to do anything for me, since he’s gone.”

Here Mrs. Jenkins covered her eyes with her blue checked apron, and gave way to an imaginary fit of tears, inly wondering, all the while, that her guest should seem so little impressed with her pathetic story.

CHAPTER XV.

“MADELINE, my daughter, what is the matter?”

Lina sat with pale features and compressed lips behind the coffee urn as her father entered with the greeting above recorded. She answered in simple and quiet sorrow:

“Mrs. Meredith is gone, papa.”

“Gone! Mrs. Meredith gone!” he repeated. “Why, where to—when?”

“Last night she must have left the house, but where to, God and herself alone know. Oh, papa, I cannot tell you how grieved I am. I had so much faith in her. I trusted her, and loved her in spite of everything, but this last act has completed her overthrow. If she was innocent, and knew it, why did she leave us? Ah! I cannot express the pain I feel at this step. Yet it has saved me the trouble of turning her away.”

“Gone, and without a word of explanation or self defence. Poor, misguided woman! What is to become of her? Lina, she must have been out of money, very nearly. I have not paid her for the last month as yet, and with all her little needs, she could not have had much left. Did she not send to you for any at any time since this affair?”

“No, sir. I have not seen or spoken to her since the occurrence of yesterday. I intended to have gone

to her last night, I pitied her so much, but it was late when I was left at liberty, and then I supposed she had retired, as every thing was still in her room."

"Well, well!" the Dr. sighed heavily. "It is a sad affair all the way through, and I cant just see my way clearly how to act. Yet her last step removes the necessity of investigating the matter in her behalf. The best we can do, is to leave the whole thing to die away, and say no more about it."

Poor Lina was willing enough to drop it, for it was a subject fraught with such pain, she shrank instinctively from openly canvassing it.

A new thought, however, seemed to strike her as she sat thoughtfully waiting the entrance of the other members of the family. She lifted to her father, a pair of eyes in which fear shone deeply.

"Papa, what if she should destroy herself." He too looked disturbed, but in a moment he replied reassuringly: "I do not think we need fear so bad an end as this. If she could do such a thing, I am much mistaken in her character—in all respects!" he added emphatically.

"Yet, remember how sensitive she is, and the fact that she took nothing but her child with her, and the clothes they wore. We cannot tell how the thought of disgrace amongst us who have treated her so well, would work upon her feelings. Oh, I fear I shall never rest again until I know where she is, and what she is doing, if indeed alive. Papa, in pity for her, poor, forlorn, and as you say, misguided woman—institute a search. It will relieve my suspense."

He promised to do so, and on the entrance of the

little girls, shortly followed by Harry, they all sat down to breakfast.

The young man looked haggard and worn as if he had not slept. Madeline's gaze rested on his face anxiously, but to her kind inquiries, he replied shortly that he was "well enough," and dispatched his breakfast silently.

When he rose from the table, Madeline followed him into the hall.

"Brother, Mrs. Meredith went away last night."

He was just in the act of taking his hat from the rack when her words fell upon his ears, and he wheeled upon her almost fiercely.

"What! gone! You are mad! How could she leave the house without anybody knowing it?"

"Brother!"

The sister's grieved, astonished tone recalled him to himself a little.

"Sister, pardon me. I do not mean to speak unkindly, but I believe that woman has completely upset us all! In the name of all that is good, *why* did she leave us in this manner? She is either guilty or a pitiful coward! I was disposed to credit her for something better."

He turned and strode up the stairway, instead of going out as at first he had intended to do, his face stony, lips sternly compressed, and dark eyes blazing.

Madeline looked after him, inwardly wondering why he should be so strongly moved; but all thought of his strange conduct fled when she discovered Agnes at her side, with tightly locked hands, and a face from

which all color had fled. She appeared scarcely to breathe as she whispered gaspingly.

"Lina, Lina! did you say she had gone?"

"Why, yes, child. But—Agnes, Agnes! Papa, Come!"

The first words had scarcely left her lips ere the child sank lifeless at her feet, white and still as if death had smitten her. Dr. Clifton hastened forward and took her from his daughter's arms, carrying her into the breakfast room and dashing water over her face.

In a minute she recovered consciousness, but turned her face into the sofa pillows on which they laid her, and refused to be comforted.

"I declare," exclaimed Kate recovering from her terror. "I do believe our governess was a witch and has left a spell upon us all. Who would have thought Aggie could care so much about anybody?"

"Hush! my love," commanded her father. He bent tenderly over the grieving child.

"Agnes, darling, dont be so disturbed. We all feel very much grieved, but I am afraid she is not worth the feelings we have wasted on her."

With the aspect of a little fury she started up now, and confronted him with blazing eyes.

"Dont say that! Dont anybody *dare* to say that of her! She was worth all and more than we could give her! She was as good as an angel. I could *kill* anybody, to hear them say one word against her! I *wont* hear it! Oh! I loved her so much! and now she's gone—been driven away by a bad, bad man! Oh! there is nobody to love me now! I shall die!"

Choked with anguish, she sank back and sobbed bitterly.

“Madeline, take this girl in charge, my love. I don’t know how to manage her,” said the Dr. pityingly, but wearily. Kate stoutly declared “she ought to be well whipped for being so saucy to papa,” and Mary looked on curiously. With tears streaming over her face, Madeline gently slipped her arm around Agnes’ waist and drew her from the room leading her up stairs in silence. With her woman’s heart, she comprehended, in a measure, something of the wild grief that stirred the little bosom of the passionate orphan, and there was more of sorrow than anger in the quieting words she uttered, when she had taken her kindly to her own room and tried to soothe her.

Meantime, did Ora remember, sitting in the loneliness of her miserable chamber, how this child would sorrow for her? Yes, and wept many, many bitter tears over the memory.

Since the moment of her waking, she had striven to account for the manner in which she left the house, but vainly. She recalled plainly the event of the preceeding day, and that which followed in the evening; but beyond that, all was blank until she found herself alone, with her child in her arms, seated by the walls of the Battery. A thought of Harry, and that passionate confession, crimsoned her brow with shame,—of Agnes, and her gentle heart ached with anguish—of Madeline, of Dr. Clifton, and she was overwhelmed with contending emotions of shame, regret, gratitude. What would they think of her now! Ah, she felt but too well that all their good opinion of her formerly

must give way now, and they would despise her forever ! She must have fallen asleep, and in that state left the house. There was no other way in which conjecture could run. If they had put her out, it would not have been in the middle of the night—it could not have been done without some knowledge of the act on her part.

The day passed drearily away. Nothing occurred to distract her thoughts from her misery, except necessary care of Ada, and Mrs. Jenkins' officious attentions. The prattle of the former was unceasing. She was full of wonder at their strange surroundings, and asked numberless questions. The poor mother was glad when slumber at last laid a temporary seal upon the curious eyes, and hushed the childish voice to quietude, as night softly folded her dark mantle over slumbering Nature.

A week passed away in this miserable state. All of the meagre sum her purse contained, was at length expended, and Ora was obliged to sell her watch to supply her wants. It was hard to part with so useful an article, endeared to her by long use and past associations. But she could not bear the thought of indebtedness to the coarse, curious woman under whose roof she had taken shelter, and as yet she could not muster courage to go forth in the world, seeking for labor which she felt herself unable to perform.

There were a few other female boarders in the house, of whom she caught a glimpse occasionally. They came and went every day, as if intent upon their several avocations. One frail, sallow looking being, with a dry, hard cough, passed her room every morn-

ing with a bundle under her arm which she carried to her own chamber, taking it away again in the evening. Ora surmised rightly, that the woman was a seamstress, bringing and carrying away her daily work.

One morning she accosted her as she went by, with a question.

"Good morning. Is that sewing you have with you?"

The woman looked at her and answered shortly.

"Yes."

"Pardon me, but where do you get it? Can I obtain some from the same place? I want to do something."

"I dont know." The woman said stopping and turning square around. "Perhaps you can, but you dont look much fit to do it, any more than myself."

Her language though half rude in tone, was not without an air of culture. She spoke like an educated person. Looking at her intently, Ora became interested.

"I should really like to try, if you will tell me where to go. Is it asking too much of you?"

"No, I will help you if I can. You have a child, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Then if the work can be had, to-morrow morning I will bring a double portion so you need not leave her. You can take the work to your room and try it, and get your part of the pay when it is done."

"Thank you! you are very kind, but—" The woman did not stop to hear her finish the sentence. Entering her chamber, she closed the door abruptly.

The image of this hollow eyed, sallow faced woman

haunted Ora all day. She could not rest when she remembered how frail and worn she looked.

Mrs. Jenkins with a species of rude delicacy, sent or brought Ora's meals to her room. After dinner on that day, when the things had been cleared away, she went resolutely to the stranger's door and knocked. She expected to be repulsed, but a good impulse was working in her heart, and she determined to persevere in the purpose which had taken possession of her.

The first tap was unheeded. The second brought the inmate to the door. She looked surprised when she saw who her visitor was, and asked ungraciously:

"What do you want?"

"I am doing nothing, and feel tired of idleness. Let me help you with the work you have on hand."

"I cant do it. I have need for all I shall get to-day for my work."

"You mistake me. I do not want the money. I have enough for present purposes. I only want something to keep me busy. You are looking tired, too, and if I help you, you will get done sooner, so you can rest."

Ora's voice was full of sweet, womanly sympathy. The stranger looked at her sharply, but was evidently softened by her manner, even while answering her in the same abrupt tone.

"Poor people cannot afford to work for anybody but themselves, and you are poor, I fancy, or you would not be here. When you have toiled as long for your daily bread as I have, you will know better than to give away your time and strength for nothing."

"Ah, but remember that my time is better spen

in aiding you, when I see you looking worn and ill, than in doing nothing. The busy fingers, you know, always lead the brain away from that which most wearies it. You will do me a kindness, to let me help you."

"Well, if you are determined, you may wait here; I will get the work for you."

She closed the door in her face, and left her standing there for several minutes. Then she came out and gave her a garment placed and basted ready to sew.

"Do you know anything about such work?" she asked as Ora took it from her hands.

"O, yes. I think I can sew most anything, respectably."

Ora smiled pleasantly as she said the words. Her heart was very heavy, but she saw a woman, poor and friendless like herself, toiling on alone. The time might come when a smile and word of sympathy would appear like a priceless boon to her weary soul, even as a smile and kind word might prove to this stranger.

"When you get tired, come and give it back to me. Don't weary yourself too much with it."

"No fear of that."

Each went into their own rooms, and Ora's swift fingers plied the needle steadily, while her thoughts were busy with her neighbor. It was well that something had come between her and the brooding thoughts of personal suffering, and that interest in another won her from herself. She was fast becoming unfitted for struggling with the difficulties of her new position.

Ada took a little pile of blocks which Mrs. Jenkins had given her, and amused herself with building houses and prattling of a thousand things while so engaged. Sometimes the mother paused to watch her, and with loving kindness, answer her questions. But a thought of the pale woman across the hall, would again set her fingers to going, and before dark, she had finished the work very neatly, and carried it to the owner.

Standing closely in the door which she opened but slightly, the woman examined it minutely, then she looked up and said :

“ You sew very well, and have done it quickly. I thank you for your aid.”

Without farther words, she turned and again shut the door in her face. Evidently she willed to live in severe seclusion. Ora was too refined, and tender of other's feelings to wish to pry into their lives, but she felt strangely interested in this poor forlorn being, and was almost disposed to feel disappointed at the decided treatment she received at her hands.

At the moment she turned away, Mrs. Jenkins came up stairs.

“ What,” she said. “ Have you been trying to git acquainted with that queer bird ? You'll find it hard work, if that's your game. She has been in that room over a month now, and not a blessed soul has seen the inside since thar she's been. Once I went to have a little chat cause she appeared so lonesome like, but she gave me to understand that my room was better than my company, an' refused to let me in. I pretended to be offended that I couldn't visit ladies in

my own house, an' hinted as much to her, when she up an' said so proud like :

““Madam, I pay you what you ask for the room. While I do this it is *mine*, and I shall receive whomsoever I please. Understand, that I have no time to waste in gossip, and no desire for such pastime if I had.””

“She puts on airs, I tell you, but she pays me a good price, regular every week to the day an' hour, so I keeps her. But she's mighty queer.”

Ora had no desire for a gossip with her communicative landlady, and on a trifling pretext, entered her room as soon as she could break away.

A few more days passed, but now employment rendered the weary woman more content with her changed estate. Every day her neighbor brought her work from the store where she obtained her own, and carried it back when done. The pittance gained was slight, but every night it was punctually paid into her hand, and it was that much assurance against future want.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHARLES LAFARGE sat in his room, lazily puffing forth blue volumes of smoke from a choice cigar, and watching the thin, spiral wreaths rise upward and melt away, when a heavy knock upon the door startled him from the pleasing indulgence. The next moment Guy Bartoni was in the room, looking excited and impatient.

"Halloa, Guy! you are late, old boy. What has kept you so long?"

"Why, the devil's to pay!" was the profane and emphatic rejoinder.

"How? what's gone wrong?"

"Nothing, but everything *will* go wrong, if we don't look out."

Guy drew a chair close to his friend, and sat down. His face was very dark and troubled.

"Charley, you remember Antoinette Wade?"

"Yes, I should think so."

"Well, she is in New York!"

"The devil she is!"

Both faces were now clouded with deep concern.

"Yes," continued Guy, "she is here; I cannot be mistaken. For more than a week I have followed her at various times, trying to get a glimpse of her face, which was concealed by a thick veil. I first saw her come out of L—'s store on Broadway, and something

in her carriage attracted me. I followed her then, but lost her in the crowd. Since that I have seen her several times, always losing her as at first. Last Saturday, I caught a glimpse of her in the Park, but was no more successful in seeing her face than on former occasions. The Keeper told me that she came there every Saturday since the weather had been warm enough, and he has never seen her raise her veil once."

"This afternoon as I came up Broadway pretty late I met Sefton, who, clapping me on the shoulder, congratulated me on my approaching marriage with Miss Clifton. We stood talking for several minutes, and I had just uttered the words: 'Yes, the day has been fixed, at last, and I shall have the loveliest bride in New York,' when I felt some one press almost rudely against me, and a little piece of card board was slipped in my hand which hung at my side. Here it is."

He handed it to Charley as he spoke. In faint, delicate tracery was pencilled:

"Two wives will imprison you for bigamy."

"And what became of the person? You saw her who slipped this in your hand?"

"Yes, it was the veiled woman. I did not want Sefton to understand the affair, and put him off laughingly when he questioned me curiously as to what it meant. As soon as I could, I got away and followed her, but she was no where to be seen. All the evening has been passed fruitlessly, and that it was which kept me so late."

"You think this woman was Antoinette?"

"Yes, I am confident of the fact."

"Bad! bad! Doubtless she heard you name the lady, and the appointed day for your marriage?"

"Too surely, I fear; and if she did, the game's up. No hope of the affair being over, and we safely off for Europe before she can do all the mischief that lies in her power. I say, Charley, she *must* be found, and safely disposed of. I thought myself safe, when that little white-faced governess was out of the way, but here a more dangerous foe steps in her shoes. By the Lord, if I ever set eyes on her again, I will not let her escape!"

"And what are you going to do with her when you get her?" questioned Lafarge.

Guy looked thoughtfully at the ceiling for a full minute before answering.

"I have thought of a way," he said, turning a strange look upon his companion. "You remember Jarvis? He is still on hand, though he has removed the basis of operations to a distant locality from the old quarters. I told you all about him before we came here."

"Yes, I do remember, but is it safe, quite safe, Guy?"

"Pshaw! yes! Money will do anything. I have the old fellow under my thumb, and he's bound to do my will. He has more at stake in the game than I have, and blowing on me would hardly answer. Besides, she's alone here. Who is there to interest themselves to find her out? I tell you, those institutions are capital when a fellow wants to get rid of troublesome *friends*!"

"How will you manage the affair?"

"That remains to be seen. Circumstances must guide me for the present, and will, no doubt, soon develope a plan of action."

"Very well, you know best, old fellow! May you be successful. But come; are we to keep our engagement with your fair fiancée?"

"Certainly. Plenty of time, if we go at once. Are you ready?"

The two descended the stairs, went out upon the street, and with arm locked in arm proceeded toward Dr. Clifton's.

Madeline had that evening a small company of select friends for the enjoyment of a private musical entertainment. Some of the most cultivated talent in the great city, were collected in the spacious music room, now one blaze of brilliance and beauty. The young hostess was looking surpassingly lovely, as she moved among her guests; a dress of silver grey silk, fitting closely to her perfect form, coming up to the throat, and falling away in wide flowing sleeves from the white arms. Guy had never seen her more beautiful, and a pang wrung the guilty heart when he remembered how unworthy he was of such a treasure. Perhaps she might never be his! There was a dark Fate over them. Should she suffer the sable veil to fall between him and his love, he was lost eternally.

He approached her with apologies for his tardiness, but in his heart he was muttering desperate vows to win her or die in the effort. He was more determined, now that a possibility of losing her appeared to his awakened heart.

That night the mansion rung with mirth and music.

Wit and humor flashed forth amid jewels of thought, and every heart in the little assembly beat to a measure that is the nearest akin to perfect happiness the soul can reach, while confined in an earthly casket.

Guy was the last to leave when the little party broke up. While the servants were putting out the lights, he drew his betrothed into the grand old library where they had spent many happy evenings together, and took a lover's leave.

"Ah!" he whispered, "how hard it is to say 'good bye,' even though for a little while. How impatient I am for the time to come when I may never more leave you, darling Madeline."

He drew her blushing within his arms, and pressed a kiss on the pure forehead. It was the last kiss he ever printed there.

CHAPTER XVII.

APRIL had passed with her showers and sunshine, and May took up her buds and blossoms, weaving them into a wreath to twine about her brow as she smilingly began her journey in the new year.

As the weather grew warmer, Mrs. Meredith grew more and more oppressed with a heavy torpor that settled over her whole being. It was with very great effort that she continued the work with which her strange friend supplied her. In two weeks time from the beginning, she found herself unable to perform her usual task of daily labor.

In the last few days, her neighbor had appeared more taciturn and stern than usual. Now she came in, tapped at Ora's door, and laid down the bundle without a word, passing to her own room without ever seeming to think of the curiosity such conduct might excite. In the evening she carried it away again in the same manner. She usually came in after this was done, about eight o'clock, and was seen no more until the following morning.

It was the day following that on which Guy Bartoni had been alarmed by the incident on Broadway, that she came to Ora's room early in the afternoon with a neat roll of work in her hand. Her manner was not less distant than usual, but there was a something

strangely sweet in her voice as she spoke, handing the bundle to Mrs. Meredith as she did so:

"I have an important errand to do this afternoon, but I have promised this work shall go home as usual to-night. I have not time to finish it and accomplish the other, so I come to you. If you will do it, I will make the consideration equal to the task."

She was looking straight at the pale, fast fading face of the sufferer as she spoke, and noting the rapid change of the last few days, drew back and said hesitatingly:

"Yet I ought not to set you at a double task. You have enough of your own, which it is quite as necessary to finish, and are already worn almost to death. I am worse than blind to have thought of it. I would not, had it not seemed so imperative. I have tried to put it off, but all day something haunted me, urging the necessity of immediate action. Much may depend upon it—the peace and happiness of a life-time are often marred by an hour's neglect of a duty we owe to others. Yet I don't know just how I ought to act in this. I have passed my word, and do not like to break it."

"Don't think of it. I can easily do what is necessary," answered Ora, taking the work from her reluctant hand. "If there is, as you hint, an absolute necessity of performing a duty to secure another's happiness, you would be culpably wrong to neglect that duty. Go by all means, and do not feel concerned for me. God will give me strength for the labor I am compelled to perform."

"Do you honestly believe that?" queried the woman with an intense look that held Ora's gaze in spite of herself.

"Assuredly I do."

"*Then cling to your faith!*" was returned impressively; but the words were followed by a short hard laugh strangely at variance with her manner as she uttered them. Then she added half in explanation:

"I *once* had faith, but I have lost it—aye! even in God! Don't stare. It began in my own home, among friends I trusted, and the evil followed me till all confidence in mortals fled; and with it, my faith in God, eventually. You look what I know you feel, but it is true, and your horror will not change the bitter truth. I would give my life for one tithe of my old trust. Then I had charity, and now I have none. Without charity, the human heart is like a flower without either dew or rain to nourish it, and everything beautiful or lovely in it fades. Dry and dead, without odor or color—how do we look upon it? Just like that flower is my heart to-day, without faith, hope or charity. Oh! see to it, that you preserve your faith, woman!"

Hard, bitter, almost passionate were the tones in which this was delivered. The wondering hearer looked with pity upon the wretched being who could declare herself so dead to all that was good and noble in nature. But her close observation here aided her in a fitting reply.

"How strange it seems that people will sometimes misrepresent themselves. If your heart were the

dead thing you call it, you would be utterly incapable of one ennobling emotion."

"And am I not?" was the bitter response. "I feel as if I never can again on earth know a good thought, do a good deed. I don't care!"

"Do you know you are not speaking truth?" asked Ora, steadily.

"Why, how dare you say that to me?" said the woman hastily and with growing excitement.

"Come, do not get angry. I mean no unkindness. I only want to prove to you how unjustly you abuse yourself," Mrs. Meredith hastened to say gently, but still with firmness. "In the first place, unwilling to break your word to your employers, you bring this work and ask me to finish it that they may not be disappointed. That betrays good feeling and a beautiful principle of truth and honesty. Then you assign as another reason, a duty to perform on which rests the happiness of some one. To perform that duty, you inconvenience yourself. In your desire to preserve the happiness of others—in your reluctance to overtask me because I look worn and ill—in all combined, you have here in a few moments shown me that you are truthful, generous, and kind. The world may have embittered you with its cruelty and injustice, but God endowed you nobly in the beginning, and the seeds of His goodness are still in the heart you would have me believe dead to good emotions. Why will you do yourself and your Creator such wrong?"

As Ora finished, her hearer stood gazing at her in undisguised astonishment. She had never looked

upon the frail, delicate, seemingly dependent, helpless woman with a thought of such strength in her nature. Her firm, straightforward, yet gentle reproof stunned her for several moments into utter silence. Then she smiled faintly, and replied in a half musing tone :

“Some people seem to have the faculty of finding pearls buried in mud, where none would ever dream of the existence of a gem. I shall class you in the number of these rarities,” and without further words turned abruptly away, and descended the stairs.

This strange conversation with the strange woman, made a deep impression upon Ora’s mind, and as she sat sewing, she thought of everything that had been said, and mused upon it. Time passed almost unheeded while thus engaged. She did not leave her work or think of leaving it, until gathering shadows rendered her unable to see. Then she remembered that it was the hour for carrying the work home, and momentarily expected the return of her neighbor.

Hastily lighting her little lamp, she rather nervously took up the work again, eager to finish it before her return, and fearing her ability to do it. It wanted a good half hour’s work before completing, and feeling weary now that her mind was recalled from its thought realms, she surveyed the article ruefully. But the desire to get through was strong, and nerving herself for the task, the needle flew in and out of the cloth like a little glancing ray of light. Ada had become tired of play, and begged for her supper ; but with a few words of encouragement, she put her off till the task was finished. A little

story served to keep her quiet for a time, and at last the mother with a deep sigh of relief, rose and folded the finished garment and wrapped it up. She felt thankful for the strength which had sustained her to the completion, so that the woman might not be disappointed. But as time still sped and she did not come, a feeling of uneasiness began to take the place of gratification. She gave Ada her supper and then sat awhile to amuse her with little songs and stories, as was her custom. Ora loved her child beyond any earthly thing, and felt the necessity of perfect freedom of intercourse between herself and her daughter, to establish that affection and confidence so lovely in such relations. It was her constant effort and care to lay her little daughter to rest with a happy heart. No cloud must settle over the pure young mind to mar it with hideous visions in sleep. A sweet, soothing song as a lullaby, or a pretty little story to amuse and please her, were the regular routine, together with the little prayer, after which the blue eyes closed peacefully, and the happy child was at rest. These hours were sometimes heavily taxing, but oftener served to soothe and quiet her own overstrained nerves. The happiness she strove to spread as sunlight over the fair head of her innocent child, reflected into her own troublous life, a ray that brightened its darkness and kept hope and energy alive. On this evening it acted like a charm. After the little lashes had settled upon the soft cheek in sweet repose, Ora sat by her a long time in quiet, peaceful thought. The clock on Mrs. Jenkins' mantel piece below stairs striking ten, at length aroused her.

“Ten! and she has not come! What can have happened to keep her?” she murmured. A feeling of alarm began to take entire possession of her. She was more interested in this strange being than she had ever realized until now, and she soon found herself striving to devise a means of tracing her. A moment’s thought, however, convinced her of the futility of such an effort. She had not the most remote idea of the direction she had gone, and it was growing late at night. All thought of search was folly.

She remained waiting and listening for her footsteps till after midnight, when the thought occurred to her that she might have come in while she was engaged with Ada, and it then being too late to carry the work to the store, which closed early, she had gone to her own room and retired.

It seemed so probable, that Ora now endeavored to dismiss her fears and try to get some sleep. Fear of disturbing the household prevented her assuring herself fully by knocking at the door and ascertaining the truth; so she at length retired and soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"SISTER, there is a strange woman down stairs who says she must see you. Mollie says she looks wild, and told her to go away, but she wont do it till she sees you."

Kate burst into her sister's room excitedly, and delivered this little piece of intelligence. Madeline rose from the work on which she was engaged, in wonder and curiosity.

"A strange woman, Katie? what can she want with me? I'll go and see, however. Some beggar, perhaps."

"No, she dont look like a beggar," asserted Kate, positively. "But she does look like a crazy woman. I feel afraid of her. Dont go down, Lina."

"Nonsense, my child, she could do me no possible harm, even were she what you imagine."

Kate followed Madeline from the room and stopped upon the landing where she could see the stranger, who sat upon the hall sofa waiting. She rose with an air of proud deprecation as the young girl approached her, but the keen eyes swept her from head to foot at a glance. The slight expression of trouble and fear went out as the survey was completed, and a sorrowful pity took its place. Madeline fancied that she saw a mist obscure the strange orbs as she gazed in surprise upon her visitor's face.

"You wished to see me?" she asked, kindly
"What can I do for you?"

"Nothing, lady, except to listen to what I have come tell you. Will you take me somewhere that I may speak to you freely without being heard by others? Do not distrust me. The request is a strange one for a stranger to make, but I make it for your own sake. You would not wish others to hear what I have to say to you."

With increasing wonder, Madeline turned to the library and bade the woman follow her. On entering, she pointed her to a seat.

"Sit down," she said. "You look tired. Now, what have you to say to me? I am impatient to hear."

An unmistakable mist now gathered in the dark eyes, and the woman's voice faltered painfully.

"Believe me, Miss Clifton, I would rather perform any task than that which brings me here; but you are in peril, and I dared not hesitate to discharge the duty I owe you. It is doubly hard now that I have seen you. You look so young and trusting. Yes, it is very hard to tell you that which may, perhaps, change the whole current of your life, even as mine has been changed."

"You speak in riddles," replied Madeline, with growing impatience. "How can I be in peril—of what? Please come to the point at once."

"I will. Pardon me if I am over blunt. I would not seem impertinent. But you are engaged to be married to—to—Guy Bartoni?"

A spasm contracted the sallow features, as if severe

pain accompanied the mention of the name. All the color forsook Madeline's cheek on the instant, and she gazed speechlessly at her visitor, ere she could articulate :

"Well, and if I am, what then?"

Instead of replying, the woman covered her face with her hands, and her frame shook violently, either with pain or passion. A cold horror crept over the frame of the young girl as she looked upon the strange, plainly habited, cowering creature before her. Her evident poverty ; her shame and distress, told a painful story. Madeline's heart lay like lead in her bosom, and a cry like a wail burst from her lips :

"Do not, do not tell me what I fear—do not say that he has wronged you!"

The woman looked up quickly, and a hard, stern look replaced the pitiful anguish it had shown but a moment before.

"But I do say it! Aye! he has *bitterly* wronged me, and would add to the black sin with which his soul is stained, by wronging *you* likewise. Ah, I see by the horror in your face what you are thinking ; but you are mistaken ! I was, a few years ago, as fair as you, and as pure—I believe as good as you can be. It is suffering which has changed me, not sin, as you think ! My only sin has been in the mere fact of ever having loved a man so black-hearted as Guy Bartoni ; and I do believe it must be sin, deep and deadly, to love such as he ! But I must give you proof of what I say. This will explain all."

She took a folded paper from her bosom and handed it to Madeline, who received it with a shiver. A

terrible dread paralyzed her. She had scarcely power to unfold the little slip of writing she held. When she did, a numbness froze her blood till even her breath seemed stilled as she read. It was a certificate of marriage, duly signed, and bore the date of nearly two years back.

Poor Madeline lifted her eyes piteously to the face of the stranger.

"And you—you are—his—wife?"

"Yes, lady, I am his wife, or the law makes me so in the world's eyes. But I had sworn never to call myself by the name again, and should not, but to save you. I could die when I think how I once loved him—false, perjured villain that he is! Oh, he is not worth a thought, except of scorn!"

The thin figure was erect—the eyes blazing—the proud lips curled—the very personification of the scorn she expressed. Madeline caught a portion of the outraged spirit of the wife, and a tide of resentful feeling, smothered the pain that threatened to madden her. Her voice grew stronger and steadier as she spoke:

"Tell me everything. I would understand the full extent of his deception."

The woman lifted her hands and pressed them tightly over her forehead for several seconds. Then she began slowly.

"I must be very brief. I can only tell you enough to satisfy you of my truth. I am a native of the South. It was there that I first met with Guy Bartoni. He was traveling for pleasure, and it was at the Springs I first saw him. The acquaintance

was but temporary, yet he appeared pleased with my society, and I regretted when the time came for us to part. I never heard from him after my return home to Louisiana, and had nearly forgotten him, when we met again unexpectedly. It was at St. Pauls, Minnesota, and I was with a party about to cross the Plains to California. He, and a young man who proposed making the trip alone, gladly fell in with us, and we all started together.

As we traveled, I saw a great deal of him. He was by my side constantly, and I learned to look for him eagerly from day to day, until at last I could not disguise the fact that I loved him. It amounted to an infatuation, and my woman's instincts soon taught me that he was as deeply in love as I was myself. An accident united us. I had but one relative living besides my father—that was a sister who was in California, and to whom we were going. My mother died three years previous to our journey. One day my father ventured away from the party a little distance, and in an unguarded moment, his horse took fright and stumbled with him, over a rocky ledge, killing him almost instantly, before any one could reach him to render aid. Oh, that was an awful hour for me! We buried him there where he was killed, and left him amid the wild rocks in the wilderness. I thought I should die too, then. I felt that I could not leave him, my dear, good father, and go back into the world alone. In my wild despair and anguish, Guy Bartoni whispered his love, and took me to his heart to comfort me. When a little farther on our journey, we fell in with a another party, and among their num-

ber was a minister. It required little persuasion to induce me to wed him there, for my lonely, sorrowing heart deeply felt the need of a tender friend. So in a sweet, secluded spot in the wilderness, where we camped for the night, we were married by moonlight, the whole company standing beneath the stars in the hush of the night, with bared heads, listening to the solemn vows which bound us to each other.

“I shall never forget that night. Its solemnity was almost awful. Still it was beautiful, and I was as happy as I could be under such sad circumstances.

“We all reached San Francisco together, and before doing so, the minister who married us gave me this certificate signed by himself and several others, as you see.

“I was not happy long, however, in my relation as a wife. He soon wearied of me, and my love scarcely outlived my husband's. It had nothing to keep it alive. Three weeks after my marriage, the scales fell from my eyes, and the broad glare of a thousand imperfections appalled me. He possessed none of those noble attributes which have power to bind a woman's heart to man forever, and for which I had given him credit when I gave him my heart. Unkind, unprincipled, cruel, I soon hated him with all my soul; I could not help it. He repaid the sentiment with interest. We parted at length, he going his way, I mine. I held that certificate as a check upon his actions. I would not be divorced. I resolved that he should not wreck the life of another as he had mine, and have never ceased to watch him, though he has nearly eluded me several times. My means were limited. I have been

obliged to labor hard, sometimes, to sustain life, which, after all, is not worth sustaining. It might be different, if I chose. I could force him to support me, but I would scorn to take anything from a man I so thoroughly despise. I would rather starve."

It was impossible to doubt the truth of the story she heard, for every word burned itself into the soul of the listener, with indestructible force. Yet Madeline asked half mechanically:

"And those witnesses—the minister—where are they now?"

"The minister lives in California. I do not know where the others are."

"Does Mr. Bartoni—does your—husband know you are here?"

"Yes, I think he does. I have warned him to beware of his actions. Oh, I so feared I should not get to see you before the matter was carried to extremity—before he had completed the terrible farce, and you were lost forever. I have agonized over the thought until I was almost helpless."

There was a gray pallor creeping over the thin features, and Madeline observing it, rang for a glass of wine lest she should faint. Young as she was, and selfish as youth is apt to be, she did not forget what the woman before her had suffered, or that she deserved all the pity that the heart can give. Deceived in her husband, deserted, left to toil and poverty, with the bitter consciousness of her wrongs in her soul, how much more need to think of her than of herself, even though her heart was aching over the death of its bright hopes! With all the depth of her pure nature,

she had loved him—looked up to him in the full sweet confidence of her womanhood, and saw the fair image she had almost worshipped, crumble to worthless dust at her feet. Oh, what agony for woman, in her trusting nature, to endure! There is no anguish so keen as that which rends the heart when it finds its idol unworthy its wild idolatry—when no charity or generosity can avail to cover the hideousness of its defects!

But strong in her native goodness, Madeline Clifton resolutely stifled the moans of her own heart to comfort another whose sufferings, for having inflicted the blow, were almost as intense as hers in receiving it. Antoinette clasped the little hand stretched toward her, and as she pressed her white, trembling lips upon it, begged wistfully:

“Do not despise me, dear lady, that I have been instrumental in destroying your happiness. I know how hard it is for you to bear. God knows I have reason! Oh! it has embittered me until sometimes I fancy myself inhuman! But sympathy softens us. I am a better woman than I was before I came to you, even though it was to give you pain! Tell me, that when I am gone from you, you will not remember me unkindly for what I have made you suffer. It would have been more unkind in me to leave you in his hands unwarned of your danger!”

“Indeed it would, and believe me, I thank you from my heart. You have saved me from a fate too terrible to contemplate. My God, how awful!”

She had scarcely seemed to realize before the fulness of the danger from which she had escaped through the wretched woman who had risen to her feet and stood

cowering before her. Now it burst upon her with overwhelming force—stunning, crushing her, and she fell upon her knees by the sofa, shrinking, quivering, shaken to the soul by the storm that swept over her.

At this moment Dr. Clifton's step was heard in the hall, and the daughter sprang wildly to her feet. In another moment he was in the doorway, and she had flung herself upon his bosom, sobbing frantically.

"Oh, papa, papa! Oh, dear, dear papa, my heart will break!" was all that she could articulate.

"My child! Lina! daughter! what is the matter? what has happened?" cried the Doctor, in alarm, looking down at the clinging, shaking figure in his arms, and then at the woman standing in the midst of the room, with clasped hands and convulsed features. He had never before seen his daughter so moved, and the thought that something terrible had occurred, half crazed him, as he continued to question her and received only sobs and broken ejaculations in reply. Then he appealed to the stranger sternly:

"Woman, have you had anything to do with this? Is it your work? Tell me instantly if you know anything about it?"

For reply, she stepped forward and placed the paper in his hand. A single glance showed him what it was, and the expression that swept over his face, for one moment, was awful to behold. Lina felt his arm close like a vice around her person, while Guy Bartoni's wife saw the color rise in a crimson torrent to his forehead, and his lips grow purple with rage. His voice was thick and husky as his fiery glance rested upon her.

"And you can prove the truth of this?" he asked.

"Yes, I can. Oh, sir, I came not here to pain, but to save her."

He set his teeth hard, and fairly hissed the word that followed her deprecating appeal.

"By the living God, he shall rue the day he was born—I swear it!"

Lina's sobs were stilled with fearful rapidity, and she looked up in terror upon her father's altered face. In all her life she had not seen such an expression upon it as it now wore, or heard such fearful words from his lips. She was now as white as marble with the deadly fear that seized her.

"Papa, papa! you look terrible!" she cried in dismay. "Oh, what would you do?"

"Never mind, child. Time will show."

His calmness was more terrifying than his anger. He took a step toward the door, but Madeline clung to him tightly.

"Papa, dear papa, I will not let you go now. You would do something frightful, I know, and then I should die. Do be calm, dear father! Wait, think."

Her tones were full of passionate entreaty, and the outraged father wheeled upon her almost savagely.

"Madeline, what do you fear? That I will find that man, and rid him of the life that is a curse to his kind! Can it be that you can still feel a regard for a man whose object was to destroy you? Look at that woman there! She is, doubtless, his lawful wife, and he would reduce you to a more miserable condition than hers, for you cannot be lawfully his! And yet you plead for him."

"You mistake me, sir," replied the girl, proudly "I do not plead for him, but for yourself. You are an old man, father, and no match for a strong, desperate being like Guy Bartoni. Should you meet him in your blind wrath, there is no telling what may happen; and if harm should come to you through *him*—oh, it would kill me! Think of my little sisters—pity my anguish, father—for surely the pain of such deception is bitter enough for one weak woman to bear! Besides, think of the scandal to which such an affair would give rise! Your daughter's name will fill every mouth—an object of pity to some—food for idle gossip for others! Oh! I could not bear this!"

The Doctor stood irresolute, but white and cold, until the end of the appeal. The thought of being overmastered by any man, curled his lip with contempt when she warned him; but it faded away when she painted the closing picture. That was too revolting to contemplate. His child a by-word for the rabble! God forbid! The thought calmed him to reason.

"You may be right," he answered doubtfully, "but do not suppose that I shall let this matter pass. He shall pay dearly for his villainy! If I am an old man, I am a father too—an outraged father, on whose best and holiest feelings he has trampled remorselessly, and it shall not pass unpunished. He shall pay dearly for his rashness."

Madeline's form was rocking slowly to and fro as the angry tirade was ended, and the poor old man had but time to catch the sinking figure in his arms as it fell to the floor. Then he carried her to a sofa and with loving anxiety tried to restore her to con-

sciousness, mingling with his endearments and self accusations, bitter denunciations against the cause of this suffering.

He did not call for assistance. He could not bear that others should look upon their misery. He chafed the little hands and bathed the white face with water he found upon a stand, even forgetful of the woman who had been the unwilling instrument of their sufferings. And, taking advantage of the opportunity presented by his forgetfulness, Antoinette Bartoni stole softly from the room and out into the street, now lighted by myriads of lamps which put to flight the darkness that had spread over the city.

She was weak and faint. A trembling numbness slowly crept through her veins as she turned her steps homeward. Several times she was compelled to stop and lean against a lamp post for support, or to sit down upon the white marble steps of some splendid mansion, until she could gather a little strength to move onward.

She had risen that morning with a nausea which caused her to loathe food, and through the whole day not one mouthful had passed her lips. Anxiety of mind, followed by the intense excitement of the past two hours, added to the fact of her abstinence from food, were sufficient to shatter stronger nerves than hers, but she had scarcely given it a thought until this moment, when her trembling limbs refused to bear her weight. Now she reproached herself for carelessness. She felt almost as if she should die! It would not matter, were she within her own room, sheltered by the miserable walls, which, however miserable they

might be, still served to screen her from the cold world and its pitiless curiosity. She could not bear to die in the street like a pauper—that would be terrible. In her utmost poverty, she had never lost her pride and self dependence, but had struggled bravely forward through difficulties, even as she had striven to move onward, now, despite her weakness and increasing numbness.

Presently the lamps seemed to grow numberless, and the stately houses on each side of the street enlarged to twice their size and moved like a huge panorama before her. There were forms passing her that looked like giants, and two, larger than the rest, came meeting her with locked arms. She tried to collect her strength to stand out of their pathway, but in the effort, reeled and fell upon the pavement, losing all consciousness with the fall.

It was a compassionate face that bent over the prostrate form, full of manly pity and sympathy; but the mocking laugh from his companion faded the divine light from it, as a breath of poisonous vapor would steal the rich hue from a beautiful flower. Charles Lafarge felt almost ashamed of the momentary feeling of humanity that had stirred his heart, when his heartless companion mocked him thus. Yet he lifted the head from which the little hood had fallen, and discovered the pale, still face beneath the mass of dark hair falling over the shoulders. A cry of surprise broke from him.

“My God, Guy! It is Antoinette!”

“The deuce it is!”

All apathy was gone now, and a fierce gleam lighted

the dark eyes as he too stooped to look at the face, as if to convince himself of the truth.

“You are right, by Jove!” he exclaimed. “What the devil brought her here? Ah, can she have been at the mischief I feared already? This looks bad! Run, Charlie, and get a hack at once. I will stay here! Now is our time to get her away. She may not have done the mischief yet, but if she has—”

The sentence was left unfinished, but the demoniac expression of face was more fearful than words could have been. Charles Lafarge half hesitated and shivered, but a second thought caused him to do as he was bidden, and he disappeared.

A little crowd was soon gathered about the spot, and eager questions were showered at the darkly watchful guardian, standing sentinel over the still insensible form. He answered with curt, stern brevity:

“Away, all of you! What is it to you, who and what she is, or what is the matter with her?” She is in *my* care, and that is enough. Off, and leave me in peace.”

One by one they dispersed, and others following, were dismissed in a like manner. Speculation was rife in the bosom of each. It was curious and interesting to see a handsome, elegantly dressed gentleman standing over the form of a poor, poverty stricken creature like that, and claiming her as his charge. Perhaps he had a right, and his pride, stung and wounded, sharpened his tongue to strangers who witnessed his humiliation. An unfortunate sister, or relative, perhaps! Who could tell?

Aye! who could tell? How little would any one dream of the relation existing between that proud, stern man, and the poor, prostrate woman! Who would dream that it was his *wife* he thus stood over, eager, fierce, watchful, like a hungry tiger watching its prey?

In a short time he was relieved, as Charlie sprang from a cab that drove rapidly to the spot, and assisted him to lift her within. Then the two entered the vehicle, and bidding the driver move on, fastened the door upon their unconscious victim—now fully in their power.

Away! past those elegant structures—through teeming, rattling Broadway, and on, up one street, down another, then up another, till it would have been almost impossible to follow in the mad, intricate drive, out into the darkness and obscurity of the city, beyond its limit of culture, and warmth and beauty. Here all was rank, loathsome, foetid and poisonous, wherein swarmed hundreds of human beings like vermin, terrible in their want and poverty. But it was not here that the journey was to end! Still on, over stones, through mud—over a dull, ugly road, until the dark outlines of a gloomy structure was faintly traceable against the sky; surrounded by trees, and seeming to frown gloweringly over all who should come beneath its shadow.

Here the carriage stopped, and the driver dismounting from his box opened the door and the two men emerged from it—one looking up regretfully at the grim walls—the other heaving a sigh of relief, while an ejaculation escaped him.

"At last!" he said. "What an age it has taken you to drive this distance," he growled at the driver.

"Sure sir, an' I came fast as the horses could carry us at all, at all. They ran just as if, fur all the world, the divil hisself wur afther thim. Divil the minit did they iver slacken their pace to brathe; but fur all that, yer honor's not satisfied with all poor Pat or the bastes could do."

"Shut up, you blunderhead!" commanded Guy in a fierce undertone. "Who asked you for all this tirade? Go and ring that bell there by the little door in the wing. Ring twice—once quickly—then wait while you count six and ring again."

The man took off his hat and thrust his thick fingers through the mass of matted sandy hair over his flat forehead, but obeyed the order as well as he could, stooping down to make his way under a mass of vines that hung over a frame near the little gate. When he had succeeded in reaching the door, he got hold of the bell handle and gave it a sharp pull. He then waited to count sixteen, very deliberately, before he pulled it again, muttering under his breath:

"Sure, an' I'll count six wid a vengeance--the dirty spalpeen! to talk to a poor divil in that way afther the divil's drive I give him. Halloa! are ye comin', thar!"

The last exclamation was drawn from him in a deeper undertone, as a step sounded within. The next moment, a bolt was drawn, a key turned, and the door being slightly opened, a gruff voice demanded what was wanted.

The Irishman was saved the trouble of replying, by

Bartoni himself, who stepped upon the stoop at this moment, and roughly thrusting the man aside, whispered a few words in the ear of the doorkeeper.

Without another word, the fellow opened the portal wider, and as Guy went in, he bade the man go outside and wait for him.

Ten minutes later, while Charles Lafarge was pacing the little space between the gate and the carriage, Guy came out, followed by three men. Thrusting his arm in Charlies', Bartoni drew him to the other side of the carriage, and the men opening the door, took out the still helpless woman, who had lain all this time upon the cushions.

"She might recognize us," whispered Guy. "They have their orders, and know what to do with her. Listen!"

A faint, pitiful cry escaped Antoinette's lips as the two men lifted and carried her through the little gate. The third man waited until they entered the door and Guy came round to where he stood. Then nodding his head with the simple word "To-morrow!" he disappeared within the building, and the two men re-entering the conveyance, the driver turned his horses' heads once more towards the city.

Perched upon his box, the man ruminated upon the object of the strange proceedings he had witnessed. He was not bright or shrewd, but his memory served him to link these events into a suspicious chain against the men inside his coach. First, Charles Lafarge's excited manner as he called him, and gave him the direction he was to drive—(information which had been received that very evening during a conversation

upon what was to be done in case the woman they sought should be found), followed by the entrance of the stranger—the long drive, the mysterious house and its mysterious inmates, as well as the gentleman's surly humor, spoke of anything but a just or pleasant transaction. Patrick O'Neal carefully stamped each and everything he had seen and heard, upon his memory, by a process of his own fashion, and mentally resolved to look out for a key to the enigma, if only to spite the "spalpeen for bein' so hard on a poor divil as did the best he could for him." It will be seen that Patrick was sensitive and not overforgiving in his nature.

Guy and Charles Lafarge got out of the cab on Broadway, near Maiden Lane, and paying the man liberally for his time, turned away and were soon lost in the distance.

For several moments after they had gone, Patrick remained standing where they had left him, clutching the golden coin he held, tightly, and evidently thinking with all his might. A vague idea of something he ought to do seemed struggling in his mind for development, but ideas had to labor hard within his thick skull, ere they could result in any tangible purpose, and now, after deliberating for some time to no account, he slowly mounted to his perch, and taking up the reins, drove away, still perplexed and uncertain.

As for Bartoni and his comrade in villainy, after leaving Maiden Lane, they went up Broadway some distance before either ventured to speak. Guy's mind was clouded with fears. He would have given anything he possessed to know where Antoinette had

been, ere falling in that swoon in the street. Yet what else could bring her to that portion of the city, save the wish to do him harm. He had every reason to suppose that she had heard him speak Madeline Clifton's name the day she thrust the little card into his hand, bearing the lines which warned him of her presence. It would be no hard matter to find out her residence, knowing her name, and his prophetic fears told him that she had betrayed him to his betrothed. In that case, he was thwarted in everything but his vengeance on her. That would be proportionate to the injury she had done him !

Poor Antoinette !



CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT changes come to us in a brief space of time ! A day may serve to strip us of all we hold dearest on earth, an hour to crush all the fairest hopes of life, leaving us heart sick and desolate.

Poor Madeline Clifton wept away the first bitterness of her grief in the loneliness and silence of her own chamber. Hers was too true and loving a nature not to feel deeply a woe like this. She would have staked her life on her lover's truth and goodness, yet how bitterly had she been deceived. But for the incontrovertible proof she had received, she must have trusted and loved him still. But that little strip of paper in the hands of the miserable woman who called herself his wife, had swept away her faith in him forever ;

and with her trust, her love must die. That love had received a terrible blow, and with a fearful cry of agony recoiled, struggled, wailed and died forever! Nothing but the dead chill ashes were left on the young heart's altar, and pride, rising with slow but gathering firmness and power, began to sweep them away with a sure and steady hand.

For herself the bitterest trial was over. For others the pure heart bled still. When she gathered her strength, and with a patient sweetness almost angelic came down to breakfast as usual, the morning after the awful revelation which had blighted her life, it was for the sake of others, that they might not feel too deeply the blow, by witnessing its effect upon her.

The Doctor's usually kind face was stern and hard. He could not forget. The lessons he had impressed upon the minds of his children, and which his daughter was practising now—"that self-control gives strength to combat all evil," seemed entirely to have faded from his own mind. Through the whole night sleep had not visited him, and the cauldron of his wrath boiled hotly, leaving the sad impress upon face and manner.

Madeline cast her eyes around the circle with a sickening sensation at heart. Agnes Montes was no longer like herself. The time that had elapsed since Mrs. Meredith's disappearance, had metamorphosed her. She seldom spoke, and when she did, her tones had the bitter acrimony of an adult whose whole life had been a series of disappointments, till nature became misanthropic. The darkly beautiful face had grown thin and sharp in its outlines, while the black

eyes, burning with an ever fitful light, looked almost ghostly in their size and expression.

Kate's joyous laugh, and Mary's innocent prattle were hushed, and with pained expressions upon their fair young faces, their glances wandered silently to each member of the family, returning again to their plates, misty with tears.

But it was when she looked upon the brother, of whom she had been so justly proud, that the gentle heart received the keenest stab, and the brown eyes grew humid. The bleared orbs, pale haggard cheeks, sternly compressed lips, and general untidy appearance, told a tale too pitiful for even love to mistake! To what misery had that happy circle been reduced, and for what purpose? The soft eyes drooped, and the aching heart sent up a prayer unspoken by the pale lips:

"God, *hast* Thou a purpose in this? Oh, be merciful!"

Harry was first to break the silence that reigned. His tones were fretful and complaining.

"I should like to know what's come over everybody in this house! I have not heard a pleasant word, or seen a smile, and I begin to doubt the evidences of my own senses sometimes, and fancy some malicious sprite or fiend has transported me to unknown scenes and new associations. This is no longer my pleasant, happy home, but a funeral shade where every indication of joyous life must be suppressed. What is the matter with you all?"

"You will know soon enough," was the grave, half severe response from the father. "Meantime, be

so good as to keep complaints to yourself, for at this moment they are particularly unwelcome."

Harry's brow flushed angrily, but he made no reply. Universally tender and kind as his father ever had been, he was aware that it would be rather a dangerous experience to break through one of his most rigid rules, which was that no unpleasant circumstances should ever be discussed in the presence of the younger members of his family.

"Of what use," would he argue, "is it, to taint the young minds of little children, and darken their lives with evils in which they have no part? Life brings all these things soon enough, and experience is the best, though a very painful teacher. Keep their hearts disposed to charitable impulses while you can, and to do this, you must make it beautiful. It is cruel to turn the dark side of a picture for child eyes to look upon, when there is a bright one to be seen."

And, in my humble judgment, were these reasonings more prevalent in the minds of parents, children would grow up with purer hearts and minds, capable of greater love and charity for a world, *which we make hard and cold by the people we train to live in it.*

When the meal was ended, the Doctor rose and requested his son to follow him to the library. Poor Madeline trembled in anticipation of the story that would there meet his ear. What would he do? He had been called away in his father's place, the day previous, to visit some patients at some distance, and had not returned until late in the night. He was therefore ignorant of all that had passed, and was yet

to learn the shame of the black deceit practised upon his beloved sister.

With a fervent prayer in her heart that God would guide them all aright, the noble girl took up the duties of the day bravely and patiently.

Calling the little girls together, she spoke to them with forced, but loving cheerfulness in her tones.

"Don't look so sad, my darlings. There is no need. I see your dear faces clouded because ours have been; but it has passed, I hope, and the little trouble that worried us will soon be over. I want you to forget it and be yourselves again. Katie, you may finish that drawing for my bedroom to-day, dear, and Mary can work on my card basket. Put your fairest colors in it, pet, and make it bright and pretty. And you, Aggie, what will you do for sister?"

The child stole to her side closely and slipped a little burning hand in Madeline's soft palm.

"Love you," she answered plaintively. "It is all I can do, I'm afraid. I am sick and tired."

Another sharp pang wrung the gentle heart. What next was coming? What power was at work here to soften this child's cold and bitter tones and haughty manner to one of tenderness and love? Was it the precursor of coming evil? So unlike her of late, and now with these burning hands and weary tones! Terror and pain struck coldly to her heart.

"Sick and tired, my love! What makes you so! How are you sick?"

Agnes smiled a little, but after a moment replied:

"I don't know. I have felt *so* tired for a long time,

and I want something—I don't know what—till I feel sick. Oh! dear!”

“Come, you are only melancholy because we have been troubled. Is not that it? You will feel better soon again. Now I want you to do something to-day, and you say you love me, so I know you will do it. What shall it be? Oh, I have it now! I promised little Ellen Parker a doll, if she would not worry her mamma while she was ill; and as she was very good and quiet, she must have it. How would you like to go out and buy one for her, darling? Kate and Mary can go too, and when you come back, you shall dress her with some pretty pink silk I will give you for the purpose, and little Ellen can be made so happy: Don't you think you would like it?”

“I suppose so,” was the reply, but the tones were very dreary. Evidently the little girl had no heart for the proposed employment.

Still, knowing action to be the best remedy for sadness, Madeline resolved to engage the children as pleasantly as possible, to make them forget unpleasant things, and as Kate and Mary seemed eager for going out, she went up stairs to see them prepared for the street, and soon sent them away, feeling relieved to have done this much. The many sights upon the sidewalk would prove to them a happy diversion, and something of that nature was very desirable while her home thus rested under a cloud.

Her first impulse after seeing the little girls off, was to hasten to the library to her father and brother, but when she arrived at the door she found both had gone out. Sick with dread she went up to her own room

and fell upon her knees. There the great sorrows of her young life found vent in prayers and tears, wrestling with God as His children only wrestle with Him when in agony of spirit. Believing His promises, claiming His love, we who follow the divine teachings of the Savior, will not give up the struggle, but cling to those promises for relief and aid until our agony is soothed with the whisperings of the recording Angel who proclaims our sins erased from the Book of Life.

But notwithstanding the firm reliance placed in protecting power, Madeline was only human, and weak to struggle thus unaided with her destiny. Father, brother, all seemed absorbed, and there was no arm on which to lean, except God's, in her sore distress. She was strangely placed for one so young. There were very heavy burdens of responsibility upon her young shoulders, and now in her misery, when she needed a sympathizing friend on whom she might lean and seek comfort, she was compelled to fall back upon her own strength, and fight the battle for victory alone.

Oh, could she have had, but for one hour, a mother's bosom on which to lay her weary head and weep, the heavy load would grow less oppressive! Were even her father or brother to take her tenderly in their arms and speak loving encouragement in her ears, she would feel new impulses for life stirring within her bosom! But they had left her to herself, and gone without a word—and for what? A dozen times the question returned to her mind, whence she strove to banish it!—Had they gone to look for Guy? If so, what would happen? She dared not think of it. She

had her father's promise not to get into a quarrel with him, but Harry! He was young, strong and full of passionate life! There was no guaranty for his silence! She could scarcely wish it, for with all her gentleness, Madeline was proud, and felt the insult deeply that Guy Bartoni had put upon her. Yet her love for her dear ones was strong, in her woman's heart, and she shrank from a contest with danger lest they should suffer.

At the sound of her father's step below, Madeline hastened down stairs, but he had gone out again and entered his carriage, and blaming herself for her foolish fears, she turned back to her room.

I am afraid that some of the young housekeeper's duties were unattended, however, that day. By strong efforts she succeeded in busying the girls with their various employments, and it was with a real flash of pleasure that she saw Aggie's wan face lighted with wakened interest, as her little fingers fashioned the robe the devoted sister cut and fitted for the doll she had bought. But after that, she wandered restlessly from room to room, striving vainly to engage herself in something to make her forget the haunting memories that arose to agitate and unstring her nerves.

Once she went into Harry's room. It was in sad disorder, and she sighed heavily as she glanced around the pretty chamber, and noted evidences of his growing carelessness, which the chambermaid's duties scarcely served to remove.

His books and papers he allowed no one to touch, but himself, and these were scattered profusely over table and desk.

A little bronze hand resting upon a loose sheet of paper, attracted her attention. She observed that hasty lines were scrawled upon it, but in a half absent manner took it up, glancing down the page wearily. Suddenly her eyes fixed upon words that sent the hot blood coursing in a wild wave to her heart. What could it mean! Again she lifted her eyes and re-read the whole, then with a low cry, she sank upon the carpet, covering her face with her hands.

"This, too! this too! Oh, God, the cup is bitter! I am but human, and too helpless to drink it. Let it pass from me."

These were the burning words that were traced upon the paper that fell from her grasp and fluttered to her feet:

"What is life to me now? It might have been very bright and beautiful, but I myself helped to destroy every hope I reared in the freshness of my youth. I have driven the woman I loved from my father's house, as though she were the guilty thing I can never believe her to be. *Why* did I tell her of my love, and that, too, in the hour I had brought her face to face with the man whom I feel to have belied her? My God! I shall go mad! A wanderer! Perhaps an outcast from very want; and it is I who have driven her hence! Why did I not keep quiet and clear her fame, as the man should do who loves a woman truly! Oh, mad, blind fool that I have been. Too late, too late! She would hate me now, even had she been disposed to do otherwise before. I hate myself! It matters little what becomes of me. The sooner this miserable, hateful, and useless life is ended, the better

for me and all that love me. I am beside myself, and reckless. Shame and sorrow must come of it. I would that I were dead !”

And this was the solution of the enigma which had puzzled her for so long ? Oh, where was her woman’s wit that she had not before seen it ? This had paled the ruddy cheek and dimmed the bright dark eye ! This had driven him from his pure, manly habits, and brought him into evil associations. This had stained his once spotlessly pure name, and made him, she knew but too well, the frequenter of places where, in early youth, his foot had never trodden !

What could she do to save him ? He must be saved ! She could not bear to see her handsome, proud, and manly brother sink from his height, and fall to the lowest depths of reckless misery. That morning she had observed, for the first time, how rapidly he was falling, and from a fate so cruelly dark and terrible, she seemed powerless to rescue him. Further and further, each step she took forward, plunged her into utter misery. If life had become thus wearisome, here was a double inducement to call out Guy and stand a chance of getting rid of it. To her excited fancy, he seemed even now seeking to madly cast that life aside, in his blind recklessness !

Then came in a thought of Ora ! Ah ! poor Ora ! She could see it all now ! What had she not suffered ! *This* was what had driven her hence, and not a sense of guilt. It was her brother’s wild infatuation ! Guy Bartoni’s falsehood ! Slowly the just mind of the girl labored through the mists and clouds of difficulty, and rested upon the truth. Did she believe his story

now? No. With her love all faith in his truth vanished. Perhaps Ora knew of his guilt and he feared her; and thus, by blasting her fame, sought to free himself by turning her from his path. Yet if this were so, why did she not defend herself by exposing him? The question rose painfully; but the answer was found in a remembrance of her delicate position and extremely sensitive nature.

Now that Bartoni's villainy had become apparent, and Harry's wild confession as written on that sheet of paper had revealed to her the true state of affairs, her quick mind and generous heart worked link after link into an evidence combatting the long array against her, overwhelming it, and at last Ora Meredith was justified.

But where was she now? Poor, wronged, heart-broken woman! Madeline sobbed and wrung her hands in passionate sorrow, thinking of her, and how she had wronged her in every thought before this little piece of paper cleared her from the guilt and shame of deception.

Now she knelt humbly and prayed for her restoration to them, that they might make some recompense for the many wrongs, cruel and bitter, they had unwittingly heaped upon her.

CHAPTER XX.

ORA MEREDITH—turn we once more to her. A few short days had brought many and distressing changes. Since the disappearance of the stranger in whom she had found a kind friend and assistant, she felt as if her last earthly stay and prop was removed, and she must stand alone, reliant only upon herself. A heavy, heavy heart she carried within her breast, as the days waned, and her strength failed her. Through the interested kindness of Mrs. Jenkins she had succeeded in obtaining some plain work, but illness and trouble combined, kept eyes blinded and fingers unsteady, until her employer grew impatient over the delay of the articles that were to have been returned at a certain time, and when it was carried home, she received the brusque assurance that it was the last she could have, only “to keep and spoil,” and then Mrs. Jenkins, seeing no fair prospect in the future, after seizing everything available, turned the wretched lodger forcibly into the street. Stinging and insulting words followed her from the coarse, vile tongue of the woman, and catching her child to her bosom, weary and miserable, she wandered away amid the fury of a thunder storm that was raging without. Both were soon drenched to the skin. Both weary and faint from fasting. Life now promised little but utter misery in the future. Toil, pain—poverty in its

bitterest form to battle with, and its attendant evils of scorn, misconstruction, unfeeling rudeness and want of kindness. How could she hope for anything better, when she had struggled vainly for so long against it? What had she done, that life should be turned thus to gall and bitterness in the bloom of her youth and freshness? Ah! the heart sickened and shuddered under its heavy load of almost insupportable woe! The little child in her arms, thin and pale, and pinched with want—absolute want, must now lie there, perhaps, and die of starvation. The dreary, hopeless future lay before her. Had she work, her strength was too far spent to accomplish it without first, rest and kind care to restore her. Where could these be found? No where on earth that she knew. There seemed nothing left her but to die.

To die! Ah, what thoughts rose with the word. *Death* was rest—peace and rest eternal. Unkindness could not penetrate the grave, nor scorn stir the heart to tumult from its calm repose. Cold and want could not reach beneath the sheltering folds of the white winding sheet, and there seemed a blessed sweetness in the thought of having the weary limbs hidden away where they might lie at rest and feel no more the aching and pain of toilsome days and nights. Oh, could she and Ada lie down and feel the cold, firm fingers of the Angel of Rest surely calming the hot pulses of life, how gladly would she welcome its coming. She was longing inexpressibly for it. Too much of experience, bitter and fearful, had been crowded into her short life. She sickened at the taste of the cruel draught. Must she drink it for years and

years to come? How interminable the future seemed. And how maliciously Misery paraded a grim panorama before her mental vision!

She saw herself dragging wearily through the years, her child growing up amid coarse and uncongenial associations. Her fair, loving child, with her dangerous dower of almost immortal beauty, and her sensitive nature—both evils from which even the rich find it hard to shield the possessor from their attending dangers and pain. What, then, would it be for her? Could she guard and shield her child in her poverty? More than this, she saw Want stalk grimly by, and leave the print of his cruel fingers on the white face of that little child. Half of her life might be passed under the shadow of his gaunt form, and then at last she might see that grim spectre bear her away, and she powerless to stay the theft. “Oh, God! Oh, God! Take us from the evil to come!”

Slowly her steps were wandering toward the river. She did not know it until she stood near the pier, and saw the vessels looming up in the gathering gloom. Then there was a half-inviting music in its dash and murmur, as the boats cut through the waves, and the driving rain fell upon it. She could fancy herself quietly at rest beneath, with the bright head folded forever upon her bosom, in an embrace death could render eternal.

Her heart was aching—her brain burning. An eternal relief was in those dark, dashing waters. Why might she not take it and be free—she and her poor, suffering babe? She longed for it, she yearned for it beyond anything on earth, now. She must

accept it. But one moment of darkness—perhaps a struggle—a little struggle—in which the arms of mother and child would clasp each other, and then all would be over.

There was bliss in the thought. Instinctively she caught Ada to her heart and took several steps forward, standing upon the very edge of the pier. Sorrow had demented her for a moment—want and cruelty driven her mad. She was not responsible for the influence evil thoughts gained over her in that hour, and made death seem so blissfully inviting. It was rest, peace, love—everything to her, and she sought it wildly—eagerly.

There was a murmured prayer upon her lips, and an eager, longing look of love in the blue eyes taking a last view of the child upon her bosom; and then she bent her head and closed her eyes in anticipation of the desperate leap. She gathered her energies to spring beyond reach into the cool dark waves, but a hand fell roughly upon her shoulder, and a hard, harsh, yet not unkind voice, dispelled the madness that wrapped her brain in its subtle delirium.

“Sure, an’ is it agoin’ to jump into the wather, yer afther doin’, woman? If I hadn’t got ye this blissed minit, ye’d a ben gone, sure as Pathrick O’Berne’s pig got into O’Flarty’s garden and eat up the praties! What’s the matter wid ye! Come, tell me now, like a dacent girl, an’ its meself that’ll help ye if its in me power to do anything at all, at all. What’s the matter?”

Ora sank down with a moan.

“No home—not even a shelter in this storm—no

bread—nothing on earth but death. Oh, why wrest me from that. Go away, and let me die!”

“Die! well sure, an’ I shan’t do it, if its all the same till ye’s,” was the decided response. “What if ye’s have no home, nor bread, nor anything. Fortune is mighty cross sometimes, an’ sorrow comes to everybody. Betsey Miles has got a little house that’ll do for shelter in the rain, an’ a few praties in the corner. Ye’s shall share ’em till ye’s can get some for yerself. Come home wid me.”

A light stole in upon the mind of the sufferer. God created all life for a purpose. He had yet use for hers, and would not permit her to destroy it. He had sent His instrument to save her. There was no escape, she must submit. The rebellion that was gathering in her heart, melted under the influence of the better thoughts that rose. If God preserved life thus for His purposes, He would provide something for its comfort. Shelter and food already was offered as an earnest. She rose humbly and followed the uncouth Irishwoman who stood to her in the light of a savior; and there was repentance and shame mingled with the prayer for strength and mercy she feebly uttered.

“Father, Thou seest my weakness, and Thou alone art the source of strength. Seeing me but human, with humanity’s bitterest sufferings, Thou canst forgive. Oh! remember me in mercy.”

Ere long she became conscious of having entered a small room with a fireplace, where a little bright fire was kindled, throwing out cheerful rays of light. It looked inviting and homelike, notwithstanding the bare floor and scant furniture.

Before she was aware of what she intended to do, Ora found herself relieved, by her hostess, of the little girl, and her own weary limbs reposing in a large much worn cane bottomed chair. Everything looked clean and neat around her, and now that she turned her eyes upon the woman whose busy fingers were divesting Ada of her wet garments, she thought the face less harsh and ill-favored, and the dress, though dripping from her late exposure in the rain, was clean and whole. Sitting before the few blazing boards on the hearth, with the torpor of weariness, pain and want, creeping over her, she still wondered how it was that she did everything so swiftly and quietly. There was a little chest in one corner of the room, and from this Betsey took several articles of child's clothing, from which she selected a white night gown, and laying the others carefully in their place again, put the article we have mentioned upon the child, whom she had already bathed, and wiped dry with a clean soft towel. The long brown curls, straight now from being wet, had been wiped also, and brushed away from the little thin face; and when she was dressed in the night robe, the mother thought she looked terribly pale and deathly. Perhaps it was the gloom of evening and the gathering mists in her eyes, but she much feared it was neither, that caused the deathly wanness apparent upon the child's features.

While she looked on and strove to think steadily, Betsey Miles brought from a closet a little crib which had a nice clean bed and pillows in it, for a child to rest upon. The sheets looked snowy white, and the pillows very soft. Lifting Ada upon them she care-

fully tucked her in, and without a word left her and again disappeared, this time in another small room leading from the one where she sat.

When she came back she had a cup of warm milk and bread in one hand, and a slice of bread and butter in the other. One she handed to the mother, while with a spoon she gave the other to the famishing child.

Ora's heart swelled and her eyes grew blind when her daughter grasped at the food with a wild, glad cry, and devoured it with the avidity of partial starvation. But in a little while she sank back satisfied. The weak stomach refused more, and with a touching weariness in the bird-like tones, she called to her mother:

“Let Ada pray now, and go to sleep.”

Ora moved forward and took the little hands in her own, while repeating in choking tones the ever beautiful and touching prayer which had been almost the first that was taught to the little child, for whom to suffer death it would be nothing, were her happiness secured by that death—“Our Father.” For her there was peculiar sweetness in it, and she thought on this night, more than a double meaning. She never felt it as she did now. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Had not He preserved her from the evil of self-destruction in the hour of her temptation. Had He not given to her lips and those of her child, the daily bread that preserved the life He had willed to save? How strangely and unexpectedly had she been snatched from the fate she sought. Thoughts like these dwelt in her mind while she repeated the

prayer, and Ada's voice chimed in murmuringly. When she had done, the little girl's eyes were already closed, and almost in the same moment she slept—heavily, as if she might never wake more, it was so profound. She was weeping silently when she turned from the contemplation of the touching picture, and attempted to swallow the food Mrs. Miles had given her.

A wonderful faculty this poor woman possessed. She could keep her tongue still while feet and fingers were busy, and accomplish more in fifteen minutes than another would have done in an hour, when the heart had been more in the gratification of a morbid curiosity, than the relief of suffering. She had paused reverently during that brief prayer, but at its close she once more went to the chest, and this time it was a woman's night dress she brought out. That chest seemed the receptacle general of all imaginable kind of things; for in a little while she had taken various small parcels from it which she laid upon a chair, and at last came back with a new comb and brush, and without waiting to ask permission, unloosed the heavy bands of hair wound around Ora's aching head, and let the wet mass fall over her shoulders in wild profusion.

Ora's hair was both an incumbrance and a glory. Had there been a spark of vanity in her composition, it must have fixed upon this native wealth, which a Princess might have coveted, and been unable with all her wealth and power to purchase.

When she stood up and suffered it to fall around her, it descended almost to her feet, veiling her form

like a mantle. Great care had kept it soft and rich, while the bright gloss of the dark brown waves, gave it an air of indescribable beauty.

Mrs. Miles could not suppress an exclamation of surprise and delight, as the heavy rolls fell about Ora's person, and she endeavored to brush it out smoothly.

"Holy Mother, did anybody ever see sich a head of hair? Sure, an' if ye's was as poor as Job, this would be a fortune to yes any day. There aint the likes of this in this blessed city."

Betsey was naturally handy, and very gentle; and Ora sat soothed and resting under her kind hands, while she performed the office which made her feel such a sense of grateful relief.

In less than half an hour, she too was clad in a loose dry robe, and reposing on a clean bed in the little back room, where, after tea, Betsey brought the crib and placed it beside her.

The tea she had made strong and fragrant, which, with the thin slice of toast deliciously browned over the few glowing coals upon the hearth, made the poor wanderer feel like another being.

It was quite dark when Mrs. Miles had got all her little parcels tied up and again stowed away in the chest, and she was compelled to light a candle to complete the task. After that she went outside the back door, and Ora could hear the splashing of water, as if some one was washing clothes. Listening and thinking; she became convinced that her own and Ada's garments were undergoing a purifying process, and it was not long ere they hung smoking upon the

backs of three or four chairs, with a fire blazing before them, kindled by the woman whose resources seemed like magic, springing from all sorts of odd places. Through the open door, Ora had seen her raise a board in the floor, and from beneath draw out the wood which she used. An iron was placed before the fire to get hot, and a blanket folded over the little table, where, after the clothes had dried sufficiently, they were neatly ironed and hung again over chairs to air.

All this done, Betsey for the first time betrayed a sign of curiosity. Or, perhaps, we should say interest, for those who act as she did, are seldom moved by motives of curiosity alone. There is a deeper foundation, and goodness and benevolence are the predominant qualities in such compositions.

Bringing a chair near the bed, she planted it close to Ora's head, and asked, in a voice she strove to render kind :

"What made ye's want to drownd yerself, to-day?"

"Want and suffering!"

"How came ye's to be in sich want as to drive ye's to sich a sinful deed as self-destruction?"

"God alone knows! I scarcely comprehend," Ora replied almost vehemently. "I worked while I could. When I grew too ill, it was taken from me because I could not get on more rapidly with it, and then I got in debt, and being unable to pay board or rent, was stripped of the little I had and turned out of doors. The story is short, but comprehends a great deal!"

"Yes, a short story, but no *little* one for all that; and no new one. Hundreds like ye's have been turned

out doors, an' some of 'em like ye's have tried to end their misery in the dark river. But its very foolish an' wicked. I saw ye's pass here as if ye's could see nothing in the world, but what ye's was thinking of, an' I knowed ye's was in a strange way. I throwed a old shawl over my head and followed ye's as fast as I could, to see what ye's wanted to do at the wather. I thought meby ye wanted to get in, but didn't like to go up to ye's till I see ye's drop yer head an' yer lips move like prayin'. Thin I said to mysilf, 'now's yer time, Betsey Miles,' so up I goes an' got hold of ye's jist in time to keep ye's from jumpin' in. What's the use of takin' one's own life that's give to us to do good wid?" philosophized the queer hostess, meditatively. "Dont ye know, when the blissed Father thinks ye's has had enough of this world, He'll take you from it Hisself?"

"I believe you," answered Ora, repentantly, veiling her tearful eyes with her thin, slender fingers. "I was very wrong and sinful, but human strength is very frail. I did not think it kind or merciful when you came between me and death, but a little time for thought, and your great kindness, has brought me back to reason. Oh, how can I thank you? You are an angel of goodness!"

Ora stretched out both delicate little hands, and grasped the rough hard ones of her lowly friend. There was a curious mixture of feeling stamped upon the features of the woman. She appeared to appreciate Ora's gratitude, and was yet unwilling to accept her thanks or acknowledge any merit in the service she *had* done her. After a moment's hesitation, she

managed to speak, but her words sounded very ungracious, and strangely at variance with the expression upon her face.

"Go long wid ye's," she exclaimed. "Betsey Miles a angel of anything! Angel! a *Irish* angel! Some folks gits funny notions, an' that's no lie!"

In spite of herself, Ora smiled. The stress Betsey laid upon the "Irish" sounded too ludicrous. There was surely as much room for angelic goodness in the composition of a poor Irish woman, as any other. Yet Betsey seemed not to think so, or was very unwilling to acknowledge it. For what reason, those who knew her best, might have told better.

Betsey Miles was an exception to her class. Ignorant, uneducated except in the commonest use of the English language, she stood, still in her lowliness and poverty, above her class in native intelligence and strength of character. Hers had been a painful lot, and, unlike most in her station, she had become a better woman from the taste she had had from the cup of affliction. Her husband, a strong, able-bodied, easy natured man, had been a jobber, and in an unlucky moment, during which he endeavored to assist in the raising of stones for house building, a pulley had given way, and the unfortunate wretch was crushed beneath them. This had been a very heavy blow, for they were poor, and all the efforts of both united, had but been barely sufficient to keep a shelter over their heads, and provide them with the plainest necessities of life. Now she had funeral expenses to pay, and nothing but her own labor to bear her out in the difficulty.

But there was another trial still in store for the poor woman. In the midst of her grief and suffering, her little girl, a fair child of three years, was stricken down and died. This child had been the idol of her rough, yet loving hearted parents. Frail, tender, and wondrously beautiful, it seemed almost impossible to stranger eyes to recognize in her the offspring of such people as Billy Miles and his wife. And this seemed to please the parents as much as anything else. They loved to adorn her beauty, and every spare penny went for the purpose. Betsey was neat and tidy in her habits, and could use the needle deftly as a professional seamstress. She took in washing for families, and often when these articles were carried home, a present of some old garment from the ladies, would enrich the little beauty's wardrobe with a new article of apparel, neatly cut and sewed by the mother's hands, while her clothes, washed, were drying for the iron. She was never idle, and through her industry many little comforts were provided for the baby it might never have known otherwise. There were soft white night robes made from old linen; snowy little sheets and pillow cases, for the hardly earned crib, which became Betsey's chief pride when it had been bought and furnished; and every little dainty that could be obtained, went to sustain the unconscious author of the most perfect happiness the poor, lowly, hard laboring parents could possibly experience.

Poor Betsey's heart was nearly broken under the terrible blow of her child's death. But it quieted and strengthened her most wonderfully. She labored still, and kept her house neat, and her person comforta-

ble. She did not grow bitter and cross, and repine vainly. From the day she buried the little Norah, she turned again to her old routine, for if the poor live, they have little time for idle indulgence of grief. But someway she always seemed to find others on whom her scant means were expended, even as she now expended them upon Ora Meredith and her child. It may appear strange that one like her should seek to be charitable, still, it is no less true. She found many opportunities for the practice of her benevolent purposes, and not a few, in her simple way, had been benefited.

She had seen Ora pass her door as before described, clasping the little child in her arms, and her kind heart thrilled with sympathetic pity. Perhaps it was the strained look in the blue eyes, as she passed, or the sight of the babe on her bosom, on whom the pitiless rain was falling, that had moved her so strongly. Any way, she had followed and brought her back. Mother and child were warmly clad and supplied with food, and now both reposed on clean, soft beds. What rich man or woman could do more than had she, to relieve the present misery of the sufferer?

Ora lay for some time watching the face of her hostess, and thinking of what she had done, tracing out in the deed just performed the innate goodness of a nature at once delicate and refined through sorrow. Gradually she questioned her with interest which grew with the answers she received, and at length gathered from her the particulars we have touched upon in the simple history of Betsey Miles.

How her heart swelled for the wife—the mother—bereft of all ! What a chain of sympathy was woven between them ! Here was a woman on whom Poverty had laid a heavy hand, and with whom she had struggled all her life. A woman with a loving heart and noble mind, bereft of all she cherished, meekly taking up the burthen of her life, and laboring still, patiently and uncomplainingly, and spending its fruits upon strangers ! For the time, the two were upon equal grounds. Ora felt the simple goodness of the woman before her, above her own advantages of education and birth. Both were poor—both suffering. Why should she recognize a difference between them ? Reflection humiliated her before the superior qualities of her benefactress, with all her own advantages, she had come to want with her child, while this woman was able to bestow charity upon her in her need !

This mode of reflection was becoming very painful, but perhaps it was the best she could have fallen into at the time, and lead her into a self examination that had a wholesome effect upon her mind. New hopes, new motives and resolves sprang up faintly, it is true, but still they were hopes and resolves that might prove the seeds of future good.

But the weary mind refused at last to dwell longer upon painful themes, and in utter exhaustion, Ora closed her tear wet eyes, and with a prayer upon her lips, sank to sleep, while Betsy Miles sat near, intently gazing into the pale, sweet face, and upon the little white hand, fair, soft and dimpling as a child's, that lay over the sheets.

She too was buried in reflection. It required no

effort to judge of the difference between herself and her guest, in point of station. The delicate, refined face, and sweet, pure language would have betrayed Ora a lady to the most ignorant, even had she been drawn from a gutter. So while she slept, Betsey watched and conjectured over her. What had reduced her to this? She turned her eyes upon the sleeping child, and a painful shade darkened her face for a time and she sighed heavily. Perhaps she thought of her as high born and possessing every advantage, rashly rushing from the shelter of her home, upon the cold charities of a cold world, while no arm was stretched forth to save her. Something of this nature must have risen in her mind to cause the shadow, but it softened again, and there was only yearning, loving pity in the misty gray eyes that regarded the two so intently as the hours wore on.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SWEET and peaceful haven seemed this little tenement to Ora when the morning light from the eastern window falling on her eyes, wakened her. Betsey marched with quiet footsteps back and forth, busy in the preparation of a really dainty breakfast. The fragrance of coffee and frying ham sent a pleasant odor into the room—pleasant because she was ravenously hungry, and felt now as if anything would be palatable. Looking from the bed, she beheld a plate upon the hearth, heaped with toast, and very

tempting in its rich brown color. A grateful thrill quivered through her frame, and an earnest petition, not framed in words, but in heart, was to this effect: "God give me strength to repay this bounty. Let the bread this woman gives me, be as bread cast upon the waters. Ah! help me, that I may repay it an hundred fold. I thank Thee, my God, that Thou hast made me with a grateful heart. Oh, keep me so forever, while it is Thy will that life continues. Show me the way that I should walk, and even though the path be rough and thorny, if Thou art near me, I shall not faint by the way."

Slowly the shadow seemed to rise. The silver lining of the cloud was peeping out of the gloom, and with the first dawn of its light, her heart rose in warm thankfulness, and grasped at the hope rising slowly before her. If a way of present relief had been provided, there was no reason to despair of it in future. Faith was once more bending the light of her smile upon her, and her strength infused new life into the tried soul of the wanderer. She accepted unquestioningly. The proof of divine interposition was so strong, she dared not doubt or question: Only to wait and hope, and to arouse herself to work.

Ada, still sleeping, stirred upon her pillow, and as she did so, revealed the face before concealed by the mass of falling curls. The cheeks were flushed, and the respiration heavy and irregular. With a vague sense of fear, Ora rose quickly and caught the little hands. They were burning; the pulse fluttering. The mouth was parched and dry. No need for a second examination to tell the painful story. The

child was ill! The conviction fell darkly over the mother's soul. The cloud but this moment rising to let in light and hope, settled back with still heavier gloom, and the cold chill of blank despair blew over her heart, like the chill winds upon a desert waste.

A half-smothered moan broke from her lips, as the mother fell upon her knees by the crib, and full of wonder, Betsey came to her side to see the cause of her grief. A glance at her face a few moments before, had shown her calm, almost smiling in her new born hope and thankfulness. She had not seen her rise, and now felt half alarmed at this sudden exhibition of feeling.

"What's the trouble?" she asked abruptly.

"Oh, Mrs. Miles, my poor baby is ill! Feel her hands—look at her face! Oh! it is hard!"

Betsey took the child's hands, and her coarse face became the picture of fear and commiseration, while her eyes filled with tears. One moment she stood mutely by, her gaze upon mother and child alternately. How her own heart ached. She remembered the sunny face of the little Norah lying where Ada's now rested, while she in her wild grief, knelt where Mrs. Meredith was kneeling. At another time she might have tried to reassure and comfort her, in her plain way, but now memory was too strongly upon her. She could only look and weep.

"Oh, Ada, my babe!" quivered through the white lips of the stricken woman. "Surely, I am doomed! I could bear to suffer anything, but you—all that I have to love—the last earthly link, oh, it is too bitter! How can I bear this affliction?"

"Don't, don't!" essayed Betsey, pityingly. "May be it aint so bad, afther all."

But the mother knew that it was "bad." Ada's eyes were first to uncloze, in the morning, when well, and her voice to trill in its birdlike tones, her joy in the new born day. Her lithe feet, like elastic, bounded everywhere, and, full of lightness and life, woke all around her with their pattering. Were she not very ill, she would not be lying in that hot, heavy slumber at such an hour.

"Betsey," she said, speaking familiarly, as to an old friend, "Ada is very sick, and I must get a doctor. Where can I find one? My child must not die without an effort to save her. Tell me where to go for one!"

"Sure an' I don't know jist where ye'd find a dochter ye'd be afther havin'. Ye's might get the one that lives jist a little way up town, Dochter Wharton, or some sich name."

"Would he come to me, Betsey, if he knew of my utter poverty and misery? Suppose he should think I could never pay him. Would he come?"

"Divil take the spalpeen that wouldn't!" was the rejoinder, more expressive than elegant. "What man wid a heart, could kape hissself away, for the matther of a dollar or two? Try him, that's the best way."

Ora resolved to act upon this advice at once. Her mother's heart but too surely warned her of the danger of delay. Every other thought and feeling was swallowed up in the one great fear that had come upon her. Her own failing strength, and the atten

dant horrors of her partially helpless condition, for the time were forgotten.

Dressing as hastily as her trembling limbs would permit, she swallowed a cup of the fragrant coffee Betsey forced upon her, and hastened away in quest of a physician. Mrs. Miles had given her directions how to find Dr. Wharton, and she bent her steps toward his office with a wildly beating heart.

It was too early for him to have gone out on his usual round of visits. Her only fear was, that he had not yet reached the place. But this fear decreased as she neared the building that rose in stately splendor before her, and saw that the doctor's sign swung out in large gold letters upon a black ground, fastened to the shutter of one window of the office. The dwelling part of the house began to show signs of the life stirring within. Her hopes rose a little, but her heart throbbed heavily, and her breath came thick and fast, as she mounted the marble steps and rang the bell.

A sleek negro boy answered the summons, and stood insolently surveying her from head to foot as he demanded in no polite tone what she "wanted."

"I want to see Dr. Wharton," she answered huskily. "Let me see him quickly. My child is very ill."

Without moving, he said slowly—

"Dr. Wharton is not up yet. It is too early for office hours. You must wait. But stay; on second thoughts, you need not come to him, I think, for he will be too busy. You'd better go to some other doctor. I don't think he can attend your child."

The tone and manner of the black were too much

for Ora to bear. The fair, pale cheeks flushed hotly and her eye flashed fire. Every nerve was quivering with excitement. But her voice was firm to sternness in her agonizing intensity of feeling when she spoke again.

“I do not ask you for your opinions. I want the doctor, and demand that you inform him of the fact instantly. Go!”

He still hesitated, and Ora felt her blood boiling with overwrought feeling, when a cold, measured voice broke upon her ear. The negro started as if he had been shot, and as he moved aside, her eyes fell upon a tall, cadaverous looking man just behind the boy, whose deep set, steel cold blue eyes regarded her sharply.

“What is all this about? What’s wanted?”

The question was addressed to Ora, and she replied to it as well as she could for the hot tears that were springing to choke her utterance.

“Oh! sir, my child is ill, and I want a physician immediately. The man here told me that the doctor had not yet risen, but surely he would get up for the sake of saving a life. I cannot, cannot bear to think of losing her. Sir, she is all I have on earth!”

Her tones were thrillingly passionate. She could not control the feelings that were surging in her bosom, but they might as well have been cold and meaningless, for they made no impression upon the heart of her hearer.

“What did this boy tell you besides?” he asked, in the same measured tones.

“That I need not wait—that the doctor was busy

and he did not think he could attend my baby. Still, it is a physician's business to relieve all who apply to him, if possible, and I believe if I could see him, he would surely come with me."

"Where do you live?"

"At M— Place."

"There? Whew!"

The tall shoulders were lifted with a shrug of disgust, while the white, clammy looking lips curled.

"Can I not see Dr. Wharton?" persisted Ora, with growing agony.

"Suppose you could and he consented to go with you. Have you the means of paying for medical attendance for your child?"

"Not at present. I have but a shelter which benevolence has afforded me; but if I live, no one who befriends me now shall ever have reason to complain. I will repay every debt, God helping me."

How was it in human power to stand before that noble hearted woman, her small hands clasped, her bosom heaving, and the lofty purposes shadowing the high, white brow—listening to her eager words and sweet faltering tones, and still remain unmoved. Yet no font did it reach in the cold heart of Dr. Wharton. He only shrugged his shoulders a second time, and said abruptly:

"A fine story, and one I hear every day from your class. I can't do anything for you."

With the last words he closed the door in her face, and scarcely realizing the evidence of her own senses, Ora stood for a moment like a statue, where he had left her. Then she turned slowly away,

bewildered and sick. A misty film gathered over her eyes, and her limbs felt cold and heavy. The blow was almost like death.

How she reached Mrs. Miles's house again she never knew. She walked without any conscious volition of her own, and instinctively found the place where her treasure rested.

Poor Ora was white as wax as she entered—her lips were almost livid with agony. It was sometime ere the terrified Betsey could gather from her the story of the repulse she had met, she was so shocked and bewildered by what had happened.

But, alas! to poor Betsey, this was nothing so new or startling. Born and bred in poverty, its ills were of daily occurrence, and she had become too much accustomed to them to feel thus keenly one blow. Her cheerful tones somewhat aroused the sufferer, as she bade her watch with the child until she made an effort herself to bring the help she had failed to secure. As she donned her plain bonnet and started forth, Ora caught her rough hand, covering it with tears and kisses.

“Oh, Betsey, bring me help for my child, save her for me, and I will be your slave! Oh, I *cannot* let her die!”

Betsey hurried out, too much affected to speak, and Ora bent over the crib with such feelings as those alone can understand, who, like her, have been bereft of everything that makes life dear or endurable.

A very little while had wrought a wonderful change in Ada. Each cheek was white as marble, save

where a bright red spot burned in the centre; and the blue eyes, rolled upward, seemed fixed in their sockets. The little mouth was half open—the lips fast purpling, while the fever consumed the life in the frail form. Ora's heart seemed breaking. She could not think—she could not pray in her agony. She felt almost as if she was going mad.

It was more than an hour ere Mrs. Miles returned, accompanied by a middle-aged man who entered—nodded slightly to Ora, looked at Ada and asked a few questions, then turning upon his heel prepared to quit the place, saying:

“No use—too late—can't do anything—better as it is, anyway, better for mother and child—hard world this, for poor people. Good morning.”

And he too was gone without leaving one gleam of hope. The mother's heart was too heavily burdened to bear this addition to her bitter cup. With a low moan, her head sank upon the crib, and for a time all earthly sorrows found relief in oblivion.

Kind Betsey Miles found her hands full rather unexpectedly. The care of the two taxed her every energy—the dying child and the unconscious mother. Still, she never, for a moment shrank from the task. She thought nothing of the trouble she had brought upon herself—only of the best means of affording what relief she might to the stray waifs drifted so strangely in upon the humble hospitality she could afford them.

It was almost dark ere Ora arose from the terrible blow that had fallen so crushingly upon her, and recovered herself sufficiently to render any aid in

nursing her child. But hers was an exceedingly unselfish nature, and a pang of remorse shot through her heart when she lifted her aching eyes to Betsey's face, and saw how worn and tired she appeared. Between the mother and child, Mrs. Miles had had a hard day's labor, and her looks betrayed it in spite of herself. Now, however, the mother roused herself resolutely, and took her place beside her babe. The bitterest struggle was past, and as hope receded, despair calmed her. She knew that Death was coming. Already the light of life was fading from the blue eyes, and the signet of the destroyer was planting its impress upon the baby brow. White roses were springing in the cheeks but lately flushed with the red ones of fever, and the mother knew that the morning light would find her childless.

A still, but bitter pain was in the heart of the watcher as the hours went by. Despair crushed and calmed her, but could not deaden the feeling which stung to momentary fits of partial madness. At times she wanted to fly for aid, and seek still to bring back life to the beloved form. Love clamored for its only object with frantic energy, but Hope held no alluring light before the dimmed eyes of the sufferer.

So the hours rolled on. One by one the sands dropped from the glass of life, and as their golden gleams receded to the shores of eternity, the cold, chilly waves of Death rolled up to receive the tiny burthen about to be launched upon its bosom. And when at last the morning's sun rose and cast a flood of glorious beauty over earth and sky, the white

fingers of the mother were softly folding the dark fringed lids over the beautiful eyes, and settling the little waxen limbs in their last repose.

Very, very calm was the look of the deep eyes and the expression of the pale face, now. Words were mockeries to express the feelings of the bereaved heart, and so the lips were mute while that heart sent up wild cries of agony, unheard except by "Him who seeth and heareth all things."

Mrs. Miles's tears dropped silently as the mother gently but firmly put her aside, and persisted in herself performing the last sad offices for the dead. It was a touching sight to see the fair young face bending over the little sleeper, while with gentle fingers she brushed and twined the bright curls over the waxen forehead for the last time. Everything that loving care could do, she did alone, folding the little hands, and arranging the form as tenderly as if life still inhabited the tiny casket, and needed the tender care she bestowed. Think of it, ye mothers, who in your wild despair, shut yourselves up in darkened rooms to weep over your lost ones, while stranger hands compose your dead for the tomb! None were there to lead her away from such an office, and speak to her gentle words of comfort in her bereavement. Alone she had met her grief, and alone she must bear out the trial. Poor mother!

But now arose still another difficulty to surmount. Between the two, protegee and benefactress, there was not a dollar to pay funeral expenses. What could be done now? To whom could she go for aid? The child must have decent burial. Yet how could she

obtain the means? Oh, it is a hard thing to find one's self in such an extremity as not to be able to claim one spot of earth sufficient to lay the dead! How bitterly Ora felt this, none but God could know! Yet an effort must be made. She thought of Dr. Clifton, but recoiled instantly. She could not bear to go to him! Pride had held her back, even when starvation threatened her, and she could not go to him now! Her mind groped hopelessly amid the shadows of her position for any ray of light by which to be guided, but it was in vain. Turn where she would, all seemed dark and inextricable. At last she despairingly appealed to Betsey

"Oh, Mrs. Miles what can I do?"

"Sure, an' its a hard case inthirely," was the reply of the poor woman, whose kind heart bled over Ora's troubles. "I wish it was in me power to help ye's, but I can't for the life of me see the way mesilf. Och, hone! The saints hilp us!"

At last a thought occurred to her which she grasped eagerly.

"I will go to some clergyman and tell him of my difficulty. Perhaps I may obtain some aid, and give my child a decent burial. I cannot bear that she should be laid in a pauper's grave."

With a sad and heavy heart she started forth on her mournful errand, leaving Betsey to watch with the dead. It was sometime ere she could find out where to bend her steps in search of a minister's dwelling; and when she did, she applied at three places vainly; the gentlemen were either out, or too much engaged to see any one.

At length she mounted the steps of a palatial like mansion in the most aristocratic part of the town, and with trembling fingers touched the bell. In her hand she held the strip of paper bearing the names of the persons she had called upon, and the numbers of their dwellings. She had obtained them by looking at a Directory, and this was the last on the list. If she failed here, where should she go?

While she stood waiting, the door opened, and a young gentleman came out hastily. His eye searched her with one hurried glance, and then he was about to spring down the steps when Ora accosted him timidly:

"Your pardon, sir, but will you see if Mr. Raymond is home?"

"Yes. You want to see him? Ah, I am afraid you cannot. He is very much engaged. Tell me what you want. I may help you, perhaps."

"Thank you, but I prefer speaking to him if possible. Could you not obtain an interview for me?"

"Is it of great importance?"

"Very, sir, to me."

"Of what nature, may I ask?"

"Excuse me, please, but I would rather explain to the clergyman himself."

The young man's eyes were on her face in a full, searching gaze, but the look was kind and respectful, notwithstanding. He saw that in her which seemed to command courtesy, and he was not indisposed to give it. He turned at once without further questions, and re-entered the house. In a minute he came

back, and begged she would follow him, which she did, mounting a broad staircase, and pausing before a wide door.

Without knocking, the young man opened the door and said :

“Here, father, is the lady who is so anxious to see you,” and turning to her motioned her to enter, and bowing respectfully, closed the door again and retired.

Ora’s heart fluttered painfully as she found herself face to face with a tall, dignified looking man of fifty. His hair was white, and lent to his face something of a benevolent cast; but that was destroyed by a more minute survey of the mouth, whose stern lines were now stretched to portentous length as his eyes asked :

“Well, what do you want?”

“Sir,” she began, but the words choked her, and she burst into tears, sobbing for a moment violently.

The minister neither moved nor spoke, but stood waiting patiently for the explanation of her business. This coldness Ora felt keenly, and it served more than anything else could to calm her. Drying her tears resolutely, she steadied her voice and began again.

“Sir, I beg your pardon for this intrusion, but circumstances of a most painful nature have forced me to it. Misfortune has followed me in everything. I have lost home, friends, and the means even of living. I am alone in the world and almost an utter stranger in this city. Last night death severed from me the last kindred tie, and now all I had to love or

comfort me is gone. I am in a bitter extremity. I have not a spot to bury her—my little child, and no means of obtaining one. I came to you for assistance. Oh, sir, if you can help me to give my little girl a decent burial, all that you give shall be amply repaid if my life is spared.”

She lifted her eyes to his face in her passionate appeal, but his were pertinaciously studying the long rows of books along the walls. When she ceased, he pursed his lips slightly, and cleared his throat.

“Hem! humph! sit down!” pointing to a seat. “A sad story,” he continued, as she sank half fainting upon the chair. “I would like it more in detail, before I promise anything. How came you in such a forlorn condition? You have not always been poor?”

“No, sir. Until the few past years, I have never known the necessity of labor. But misfortune comes to all. I was an orphan when I married. When I lost my husband I lost my wealth also, and had no friends, consequently, to go to for aid. I have, therefore, endeavored to work my way upward amongst strangers. The task has proved a very difficult one—more difficult than I ever imagined, and I have failed. I stand to-day friendless and helpless!”

“Bad, bad!”

He shook his head gravely.

“What have you tried doing?” he continued. Ora flushed. She could scarcely bear the thought of going into details, but her love of truth forced her to reply:

"At first I tried teaching, as governess in a gentleman's family."

"Where was that?"

"Here, in New York."

"Whose was it?"

"Pardon me, but I cannot tell you. There are circumstances connected with my departure that you could not understand, for I cannot explain them clearly to you, and which would render an attempt very painful."

"Some misdemeanor of yours, I suppose, which you fear to confess," he remarked, rather severely.

"No sir, a misunderstanding through an enemy. I can say truly, I was guilty of no wrong, and discharged my duty faithfully, as even they would testify."

"Humph! Well, after that?"

"After that, I took in sewing, but my health failed, and I could not support myself on the little I could make by my needle. I got into debt gradually, and after everything I possessed was sold, I was turned from the miserable abode I had occupied for some time. I knew no place to go, and was too ill to seek one. My child and I were exposed to the pitiless storm two days ago, which has ended her sorrows, while mine are increased. A poor woman saw and took me in for the night, and her kindness has sheltered us since. But she is almost as helpless as I. What to do, I cannot tell."

"Did you not know that there are those whose business it is to bury the poor? Why did you not go to them?"

"Oh, sir, I could not bear **that** my child should be buried as a *pauper*. Indeed I could not."

"And why not, since she is such?" he asked coldly.

For a moment Ora was mute with agony. Then she uttered painfully:

"I know, sir, that I have descended to the very depths of poverty, and have no right to expect more. But still I cannot bear the thoughts of this last bitter drop in my bitter cup. I cannot crush the feeling of pride that makes the idea revolting."

"It is your duty to do it, however. What does it matter where the dead body is laid, or by whom, or in what condition, after the immortal soul has taken its flight to God who gave it? It is our duty to mortify the flesh, and purge it of such unholy sentiments as you have just expressed. I certainly cannot encourage such feelings in you."

Ora covered her face in despair. That cold voice had no pity or sympathy in it. And yet this man claimed to be a servant of God, from whom we are taught to expect love and kindness, as His chosen people. What wonder if for a moment the poor tried heart felt all the bitterness of a stirring rebellion, not against her God, but against the test of endurance put upon her. What had she done to deserve the long array of sorrow that had come upon her? First, the loss of home and friends—then toil among strangers—contention with difficulty, final disgrace, poverty, sickness, death, and now the cold and cruel crushing of the last faint hope to which she had clung, and by one whose hand should have been stretched out in humane kindness at least, if no more.

While the bitter tide of feeling surged within her, the minister sat still, looking severe and grave as though he had been led by a strong sense of duty to reprove wrong. There was not a softening line in the whole cast of features, and as she looked up once again, words trembling upon her lips of bitter import, she knew how vain it was to speak, and rose hopelessly.

A strong impulse held her back, however, when she reached the door. The wish which burned for utterance on her lips, could not be withheld. Tears were dried on the white cheeks now, and the fire of agony and resentment blazed in the large eyes as she turned them full on his face, one hand resting on the handle of the door, and the whole form shaking from head to foot as she said:

“God forgive you, sir. You profess to be His servant, and yet this day you have been guilty of an unchristian and cruel action. You have refused me aid when you are surrounded with luxuries. You have denied me a word of sympathy which would have cost you nothing, even when you see that my heart is breaking. I am alone, helpless, without friends, without means—anything that would give me hope or strength for the future, and when I tell you my condition and ask only the harmless gratification of seeing my child—who was all I had, decently buried, you turn me away with the reproof due to sin, and tell me it is wrong to wish such a thing. Oh! if *this* is your religion—if *this* is the religion you *live* upon, God pity you when you come to die!”

The words were spoken, and she turned away relieved, while the dumb struck minister looked after her retreating form as though she had been some wild creation which suddenly sprang up to confound him, and then to vanish from sight. Before he could recall his scattered wits, she was gone and the servant had closed the door, once more shutting her cut to drift helplessly in the wide world.

The strength of despair alone steadied her footsteps as she turned her face once more toward the humble domicile where her dead rested. She paid no attention to the hundred eyes that gazed upon her as she wended her way through busy crowds. She thought of nothing but her helplessness—and the bitter agony of her heart, which seemed likely to break with its wearying load. And yet many an eye was turned upon the pale, thin face as she passed, with the strange look in the blue eyes that gazed straight before her, and the purple, compressed lips that closed like a vice upon her misery.

Thus she pursued her way from amid the throngs to the more humble portion of the city. When within a short distance of Mrs. Miles's abode she paused and clasped her hands together in a gesture of indescribable anguish.

"What can I do?" broke from her lips in passionate accents. "Must I submit to a fate so cruel? Oh! God, what have I done that I should be punished thus? Forgive me, if I rebel, but oh, Thou hast tried me hardly, and I am weak. What can I do? Show me a path that I may walk out of the darkness into the light! God be merciful!"

There was a loose pile of old boards heaped against the fence near where she stood, and she sat down upon them, dropping her face in her hands. The world had dealt very hardly with her, and do not condemn her too harshly, dear reader, if she appears so childishly weak and helpless. Who could pass through such a series of affliction, and come out strong and enduring still, ready to battle on with adversity?

Here began a struggle between heart and brain. Reason strove to calm the tide that raged within her breast, while Love and Feeling clamored all the more wildly for the restraint Reason endeavored to put upon them.

Reason is ever without sympathy, but the strength she gives is invaluable. And now her subtle sophistry would make itself felt.

“Of what use to yield thus?” she said, wisely. “God never created a being without the power of self-control. God is just. He would not create wants without the means wherewith to supply them, nor sufferings too great for the strength to bear. He tries for purposes, and gives strength according to your needs. Have faith and rise up. Why be so utterly cast down? What have you done with the teachings of a lifetime, that they have no power now to sustain you? Has experience thrown her lessons away upon you? That which you are now suffering you have voluntarily brought upon yourself. You left a home of luxury and the friends who idolized you, because one only, whom you trusted, proved unworthy. Did you come out into the world expecting to find a

pathway of flowers? Had you done so, your first lesson must have shown you your error. Step by step you have struggled through thorns. Will you pause now in the midst of difficulty and make no further efforts; or will you rise and struggle onward? There is still the power within you. Only energy grows lazy for want of exercise. Bring it forth and use it for good purposes. You are young—the world calls you talented and accomplished. God has fitted you for a useful life. Are you going to waste it in useless pining? Rise up bravely, meet your fate whatever it be, and move onward.”

But the sore heart cried out “What can I do? Every hope seems crushed. All that life holds dear has been taken away. First, the idol I worshipped crumbles to dust at my feet. Then comes suffering, toil, disgrace, poverty, sickness and death. Why must life be so laden with woe? Energy and hope both lie crushed, because nothing in the dark future encourages them to rise from the mountain weights that bear them down. They cannot throw off the load, for there is no purpose in the attempt—no motive in the future. Life is dark and useless. Let me die and be at rest.”

“Away with such selfishness,” cried Reason sternly. “Do you live for self alone, or will you try to forget it, and devote something to others? God created his creatures with responsive emotions. Forget yourself awhile, and try to lighten the woes of some who, like you, have wept themselves blind almost with helpless sorrow. Go and try to comfort them, and see what a sense of peace will come upon

you when you read your success upon their happy faces."

The colloquy was ended suddenly, and Ora started as a hand fell lightly upon her arm.

"Pardon me," said the same manly voice she had but lately heard at the minister's. "I fancied you were in trouble, and I have followed you. I did not need words to tell me that your mission to my father was fruitless. What can I do for you?"

With a beating heart she looked up into his face. It was generous and kind, and sympathy alone marked its expression. She felt instinctive trust in his manliness as he stood up before her, but her voice faltered painfully as she answered:

"Nothing."

"Nothing! For what did you seek my father?"

"Temporary aid in a sad affliction. My child is dead, and I wanted to bury her decently. I thought he would help me, but he will not. He tells me that there are those who will give the poor a pauper's burial—no more. Oh! it will kill me! I could have taken charity, even from him, perhaps, though I meant to discharge the debt that it might not be called by that name. From you I cannot."

"And why not from me?"

"Because—because—your father is a minister of God, whose mission it is to comfort and to relieve. He is an old white haired man. It seems right to look to him for help when in distress."

"And he turned you from him!—but why would it not seem the same if I aided you?" he persisted.

She did not answer, and he continued with a half smile.

"I understand. I am a young man, and you do not like the idea of obligation. Strange! Even in the lowest depths of misery, custom hath still its power, and conventionality holds tightly upon the reins that bind society."

His last words were rather muttered than spoken, yet Ora caught their import, and blushed painfully that she should have betrayed her feelings so plainly. After a moment he resumed:

"I assure you that my sympathy prompts me unconditionally to offer you aid in your distress. But I respect your feelings and would spare them. If I can help you, say the word, and you shall have what you need. I offer to give you nothing; only to loan you that which necessity requires. You can more than repay me, if you will."

"How—in what way?" murmured Ora, faintly.

He paused thoughtfully one moment, then said:

"I have a friend who is very ill, and for whom I wish a kind and tender nurse. Come and take care of her until she is able to be removed, and I will pay you well for the service."

The color came and went rapidly in Ora's face, and she deliberated for a little while almost breathlessly. Was not this a Providential intervention, and should she disregard it? The man was an utter stranger. Whom the "friend" might prove, she might surmise, yet she had no right to surmise unflatteringly. Her feelings were of a conflicting nature, and he saw it.

“Madam, I perceive you hesitate, and I think I understand the cause. But let me assure you that you need have no fear of committing yourself. Only the desire to aid you has prompted the offer. I might get others whom I know to fill the place I offer you, but I see how painfully you are situated, and feeling your worthiness, I am willing to trust you blindly, though I never saw you till to-day. I am not in the habit of acting thus upon impulse. But a part of your conversation with my father I overheard, and I must confess it angered me beyond measure. He is my father, however, and it does not become his son to talk of his heartless cruelty. Let it pass. Will you accept assistance on the terms I offer?”

With one more reassuring glance at the earnest, manly face, Ora answered gratefully.

“I will, and thank you sincerely.”

“What is your address?” he asked.

With a sadly dreary smile she turned her face towards Mrs. Miles’s humble tenement, and pointed it out with her finger.

“There, for a few hours I have found shelter. There you can find me when you want me.”

Taking a memorandum book from his pocket, he marked it down and replacing it, handed her a small roll of notes.

“There are twenty dollars. I will send a man to take the child’s measure, and in the meantime have a grave prepared in — Cemetery, that is, if you would like her buried there.”

“I could not ask for more,” she returned subduedly
“Oh, sir, you are kind!”

“Hush! do not speak of it. When all is over, I will come for you.”

He held out his hand kindly, and said as he took leave:

“Do not lose your faith in God because some of His “professing” children err blindly. They may have rigid notions, and mean only to do right. God is good however, and it is to Him only we must look, not stopping to judge by the examples set by frail humanity.”

Tears fell fast as he turned away, so that Ora scarcely saw his retreating form. Her heart was too full for words of utterance, and he went away without hearing her thanks.

Ah! what a load was lifted from her heart. Her present need was supplied, and in this lesson her heart took fresh hope and faith for the future.

With an earnestly grateful heart, she turned back to look upon her dead before putting her from sight forever.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE sun shone brightly, and many a rain jewel flashed from overhanging bough, as Ora descended from the carriage to follow her lost darling into the Cemetery. There were no other mourners to stand beside her in her hour of affliction, but a kind hand assisted her, and a strong arm was gravely presented for support as she reeled forward, blinded by suffering, toward the open grave. Betsey Miles, who had refused a seat in the carriage beside the bereaved mother, stood a little way from the grave, tears slowly coursing down her kind cheeks. Beside the grave digger, the coach driver, and the gentleman to whose kindness she owed everything, she was alone. Ah! how keenly she felt it! Her last earthly treasure! and she was putting her away from sight with not a single kindred heart to shed a tear over the remains!

The little coffin was lowered reverently, and the mother's eyes strained a last look down into the darkness of the tomb ere the turf was heaped upon it. The whole world seemed suddenly to have grown dark! How could she live without the sunny smile and prattle of her darling child! Would she never see her more? Could it be that the sweet baby lips had for the last time lisped her name? Would the little dimpled arms never more clasp her neck in childish affection? Oh, to think that all left of the

once bright being she had fondly called her own, was enclosed in that tiny coffin, and that was to be buried from sight! She could not bear the thought! It was like madness! A kind hand held her back as she stooped over the pit and stretched her hands wildly towards her babe, but she did not know or heed it. With the first spadeful of earth that rattled down upon her, the agony of her heart burst forth in a wail.

“Oh, Ada! my child, my precious baby! I cannot give you up!”

With the cry, her form rocked and swayed like a reed, and unconsciousness brought her relief.

“Poor thing,” murmured her kind hearted protector, compassionately. “God has been merciful to rob her for a time at least, of a knowledge of her griefs.”

They put her in the carriage, tenderly, and seating himself, Mr. Raymond took her head upon his knees, bidding the driver go on quickly. A kindly nod to Betsey and the grave digger, and he was gone, leaving the first, sobbing piteously inside the Cemetery, while the other coolly performed his duty without apparent emotion. He was used to such scenes.

The carriage containing the two, rolled on rapidly. Mr. Raymond sat still, gravely looking upon the wan face he supported with deepening interest. He did not strive to revive her. Deeming temporary forgetfulness a mercy to the sufferer, he would not seek to break it, but sat gazing quietly and thoughtfully upon her.

The features appeared very sharp and thin now. Each delicate blue vein was distinctly traced upon the

wax white surface of the broad brow, and the long lashes lay upon a cheek that was deathly in its hue. What suffering was written upon the young features! The mouth, even in its pale repose, showed it in the weary expression that nothing could efface. The little hands showed it in their slenderness and transparency.

A heavy sigh escaped him.

"After all," he thought, "my sympathy for this poor, forlorn creature may prove a bane. What do I know of her? She seems deserving; I could stake my best hopes upon it. Yet it is strange—so refined and lady-like, and yet so friendless. It looks doubtful. Still, *I* should not harbor suspicions without proof. The innocent suffer far more than the guilty. Yes, and I will befriend you, poor lonely one, come what may, until I *know* you unworthy."

What sublime pity was on the manly face! What earnest benevolence in the expressive eyes! Theodore Raymond was a man out of a thousand. Young, handsome, intelligent, possessing a deep and thorough knowledge of the world, and yet charitable and generous in both heart and action.

When consciousness returned, Ora found herself in a small, but comfortable apartment, with Mr. Raymond bending over her, chafing her face and hands with aromatic vinegar. As soon as she could realize her position she began to feel deeply embarrassed. The blood flowed in crimson waves to her forehead, and she attempted to rise from the couch where he had laid her. He gently forced her back, however, and arranged the pillows under her head.

"Lie still," he said, with some firmness and a little

show of authority. "You are too weak to rise. Presently you will feel better, then I will leave you."

She could not defy his command, and lay still as he bade her, while he continued to bathe her temples. His hands felt very soft, and his touch was skillful as a woman's. Ora wondered how a young man like himself could have learned such offices.

"You feel better, now?" he asked gravely, after awhile.

"Yes, thank you, much better. You are too kind to me."

"No, I am not. Did not duty require it, interest would. I have brought you where your services will be required, as I have told you before. When you are better, you will find a patient who may need you day and night. I do not intend to tax you too heavily, for you are very far from strong. For a while, I will myself share your duties. Till you grow more able to perform your task, I will take the night watches, and you shall rest. Meantime, a faithful servant will supply all your wants. You will have only to follow directions. Now go to sleep if you can. After awhile I will send you some tea. You will not see your patient till to-morrow. Keep quiet till you are wanted. Good afternoon."

He went to the window and closed the shutters, excluding the light, then left the room quietly.

But Ora could not sleep. Thought was too busy with the changing events in her strange life. About six o'clock, a servant woman brought a tray into the room with her tea. She spoke very gently to her, and seemed anxious to make her comfortable. After she

had swallowed a few mouthfuls, she dismissed her, and fell once more into reflections, that grew more and more perplexing and painful, as she continued to think.

How strangely things seemed turning about. She was like a straw upon the great ocean, drifting whence the winds might blow, and helpless to turn any way of herself. Again, as she had done hundreds of times before, she retraced all of her past life, coming back from the painful past to the dreary present, and wondering how it was all to end.

It was midnight ere the aching brain found rest in natural sleep.

To her intense surprise, Ora found upon waking the following morning, a change of apparel spread out upon a chair by the bedside. The dress was of black stuff, rich and fine, but not entirely new. There was a set of plain linen cuffs and a collar, with soft slippers and new white stockings. The dress did not fit her exactly; the waist was a little too short, and the arms bound her slightly. Still, the fit was not so bad as to be noticeable, and when she arrayed herself, she looked once more her own neat personage. Brushing the heavy bands of hair away from her forehead, she rolled the shining mass in a heavy coil at the back of her head, and then sat down to await what was to come.

She did not have to wait long. In half an hour from the time she rose, a light tap came upon her door, and Mr. Raymond came in. His look was very kind and his manner pleasant as he came forward and bade her "good morning" in his quiet, grave way.

"I hope you feel better," he said.

"Better than I have felt in a long time," she replied.

"I shall be quite rested soon."

"I trust so. Would you like to be introduced to your patient?"

"If you please."

"Follow me then. This way."

He went out into a wide hall, and continued along it for a short space, pausing at length before a door on the opposite side, which he pushed lightly open, and entered. The floor was richly carpeted, yielding no echo to the foot that pressed upon it. The windows were heavily draped with lace and damask, and nearly every ray of light excluded. It was several moments ere her eyes became sufficiently accustomed to the gloom to distinguish the slight form resting upon the bed in one corner. Then she became conscious that a pair of brilliant eyes regarded her intently.

"Ellen," said Mr. Raymond, softly, "here is your new nurse. She will be very kind to you I know."

Ora advanced and clasped a little burning hand. The invalid's cheeks were crimsoned with a hectic flush, and her eyes wandering. When she spoke, it was in quick, rapid whispers.

"How good you are, Theodore. What could I do without you? You remember everything. Oh, when shall I ever be able to repay your love?"

"Hush! you must not talk! Now I am going to leave you with Nurse until I can do a few errands. I will be back before the doctor comes to see you. Will you keep quiet like a dear good girl till I return?"

"You wont stay long, will you, Theodore?"

"No, darling. Only a little while."

"Well, you must go then. But *do* hasten back. I feel as if I should die without you. All others have cast me off, while you are still good and kind. What wonder if I cling to you? Dear Theodore!"

Both little hands were tightly folded over his, as he stooped to kiss her tenderly. When he turned from the bed, Ora saw that his eyes were humid with unshed tears.

"Keep her quiet," he said. "I shall be here again soon. Do not talk, or let her talk, if you can help it. Whatever she may say, however, you are not to mind. She is—"

He did not finish the sentence, but laid one finger expressively over his temple. Ora's heart throbbed tumultuously. "Poor girl! she is more afflicted than I," she thought. "I at least have reason left me, if all else is gone."

The sick girl turned her face to the wall, and Ora sat quietly down beside her. It was a very luxurious apartment in which she found herself, and everything seemed to indicate wealth and comfort. Yet she was at a loss to conjecture the relations between Mr. Raymond and this girl for whom she had been called to render her services. She could not be his wife. She felt rather than knew that she did not hold that relation. More, she knew that there was a deep mystery connected with the two, and to fathom that mystery she had no right. It might be one in which she would find cause to regret connection, could it be unravelled. There might be sin and shame at the bottom, and she would come in for a share of censure, were it discov-

ered. Still she could but conjecture, and it was unkind and ungenerous to let those conjectures run too hastily towards harsh conclusions. Had she never suffered from misconstruction, that she should wrong others upon what simply appeared strange? She resolved to think generously of those with whom she thus found herself unexpectedly connected, and leave the issue to the future and the Power that ruled.

The patient was restless, and burning with fever. Ora bathed her face and hands repeatedly, watching with tender pity and sympathy over the sufferer whose cries sometimes filled the room.

At last Mr. Raymond came back, and entered the chamber looking flushed and heated. He had been gone three hours. Now he assumed a place upon the couch, and taking the girl's hot hand, tried to soothe her. His voice calmed her almost immediately, and she sank down among the pillows like a tired child and soon fell asleep.

"Go to your room, bathe your face, get some refreshment, and rest an hour," said Mr. Raymond, turning to Ora. "I will watch her."

"But I do not wish to leave you. You are tired, and need rest yourself. Let me stay while she sleeps, and you take the rest you need more than I."

"Go," he answered simply, and she dared not disobey. His voice was not harsh or unkind, but very determined. It was evident that his will must not be opposed or questioned. He exacted simple obedience, without hesitation. That rendered him, all would go smooth. Ora rightly imagined, how-

ever, that with all his gentleness and benevolence, Mr. Raymond had a rough phase in his character it might be dangerous to handle. She wisely resolved to be on her guard and do as she was bidden.

A few minutes later, while she sat in her own room, she heard the door bell ring. Mr. Raymond came out and opened it himself, letting the visitor in and leading him toward the sick chamber.

"The doctor," thought Ora. "I wonder if he is kind and skilful. He must be, though, or Mr. Raymond would not have him."

Fifteen minutes passed before he went away. The young man accompanied him to the door and then returned quietly as before. For sometime all was still. The hour passed, and then Ora went back to the sick room.

"You have not slept," said Mr. Raymond, as she seated herself near the bed.

"No, but I am rested. Will not you retire now?"

"Yes, I am going out again," he said softly, as if fearful of disturbing the invalid's slumber. "I shall trust you to look after Ellen till half-past ten to-night. Then I will relieve you, and you can rest till eight to-morrow morning. Meantime, you are to give these powders in the blue paper, every hour; one spoonful of the mixture in this phial every two hours. You will not leave her a moment. The girl will bring your meals at the proper time, which you can eat from that table, where you can see or hear every action or sound. Keep perfectly quiet. The doctor wishes this sleep to continue undisturbed several hours. He has given her a strong potion for that purpose. Does it

seem too long to wait for me? Can you watch so long?"

"Oh, yes. Do not think of me."

"You understand perfectly all you are to do?"

"Perfectly. The powders every hour—the mixture every two hours. I am to keep very quiet and not leave her."

"Right. You are as precise as I could wish. I trust you. Till half-past ten good bye."

"Good bye, sir."

He went out softly. Through the long still hours Ora sat patiently. This employment was no tax upon mind or energy. Every physical want was supplied. She did not have to rack her brain in devising ways and means, and the quiet of the darkened chamber was peculiarly soothing to her feelings. It was what she needed most, and the necessary attention given to the invalid, served in a measure to divert her thoughts from personal subjects.

She could not have found a place better suited to her in her present state. It was a haven of rest.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WEEK had passed away, and Ora Meredith knew no more of her patient than on the day she entered the house. The fever was gone, now, and she lay pale and weak, the very shadow of herself, it would seem, she was so wan and frail. She was, withal, a beautiful being, and very sweet and patient. Ora had learned to regard her with a steady affection for her gentle sweetness after reason returned. It may readily be supposed that her interest increased day after day. But it was a pain to rest under the cloud of mystery enfolding so fair a creature. It was not curiosity alone that made her long to know who and what she was, and how she had been placed in such a singular position; but an earnest wish to justify her in her own mind.

In all this time no living soul except the doctor had entered the house. The one servant attended all domestic duties, and Mr. Raymond shared the vigils by the bedside of the sufferer.

Everything was strange and mysterious. She had never even seen the doctor. Mr. Raymond always sent her to her own room at the hours he made his visits, and remained alone with him until he took his leave. This had become a regular routine. The doctor came at half-past ten night and morning. At these hours Mr. Raymond was always there. At nine

o'clock in the evening, he invariably dismissed Ora to her room, and called her at six, requiring her to remain in the sick room till ten. Then she had an hour's rest. After that she was on duty again till nine. Mr. Raymond always watched through the night alone.

On the morning of the sixth day, the sick girl was sleeping soundly, and in a healthful, natural repose. Mr. Raymond had come in and looked at her with glistening eyes, then sat down and drawing a paper from his pocket, began to read.

After awhile, he threw it down restlessly. He was doubtless ill at ease. Ora thought he looked much more worn and haggard than she had ever seen him. The long watching was beginning to tell upon his strength. Her eyes were fixed intently upon his face with these thoughts, when his glance encountered hers. He smiled slightly, and she felt the color rising to her cheeks.

"Nurse," he said, ignoring the cause of her confusion, "do you know that you have been here a whole week, and never told me your name?"

"You did not ask me!"

"True. May I atone for my carelessness by asking it now?"

"Yes. My name is Meredith."

"Was the little girl you buried your only child?"

"Yes, the last kindred tie. I am utterly alone now."

For a moment he dropped his brow upon his hand, suffering it to rest there. He was buried deeply in thought. Then he lifted his head and said abruptly:

"You are a singular woman, Mrs. Meredith."

She started in surprise.

"Why?"

"You are unlike others. I cannot conceive of a single being who could come here as you have done and watch faithfully by a stranger, and never ask a single question. Yet I can see you are far from indifferent. You have a good deal of self-respect, and would like to know with whom your lot has been cast. Is it not so? Why don't you ask me questions?"

"I do not feel at liberty."

"Why not?"

"If you wish me to know anything about yourself and this lady, you will tell me of your own free will."

"You have both patience and discretion. I suppose while you practice this rule, you wish others to observe the same toward you?"

"Most certainly."

"So I supposed. But if I were less thoughtful and generous than yourself, and asked you questions?"

"I should beg you to excuse my answering them."

"Ah! you would not tell me about yourself! Suppose I demanded it, having placed one of the dearest charges the earth contains in your hands?"

"You would scarcely find such a course necessary now. I should have granted you the right to ask me anything you chose, in the beginning, and left you to decide upon employing me or not, according to the opinion you formed of me. But you took me blindly, and have so far seemed satisfied with my efforts."

"True You are the quintessence of obedience.

But while you have watched and glided about so softly in this sick room, I have grown interested. Come, ask me some questions. Let me tell you something, so that I may have a fair right to some of your confidence. I will be fair with you. Begin."

"I have no questions to ask."

"And you do not wish to be asked any?"

"No."

"Frank and square. But I am not satisfied. Do you have no desire to know who that poor child lying there, is, in whom I have taken such interest?"

"Yes, a strong desire."

"Then why did you not ask me?"

"I thought you would tell me when you wished me to know."

"Have you not mistrusted sometimes, that there might be an unpleasant mystery connected with us?"

"I confess I have had some misgivings. But I have no right to judge unknown actions, or evils that may not exist. I only seek to serve you. God must judge if you are right or wrong."

He sighed heavily. "He will judge me," he murmured, "and He will judge *others* bitterly." Then he added aloud:

"I wish I could know all that you have thought in the past week. You are quiet. You say very little. But you are not unobservant, and your brain works all the more rapidly, while your tongue is still. Tell me what you have thought."

"That is impossible. I have thought of too many things to go into detail."

"Then give me the general course, and let details alone."

"Excuse me. I had rather not."

"I see, I am throwing away words vainly," he said, rising and softly pacing the room. His face was a puzzle now. Ora could not tell whether he was quizzing her, or had some other motive than mere amusement in the course he was pursuing. His face was grave, and wore, still, a dissatisfied expression about the mouth and eyes. He returned to the ground he had first entered upon.

"You know me?"

"Yes sir, I know your name, and also that your father is a minister. No more."

"Whom do you suppose that girl to be?" pointing to the bed.

Ora shook her head.

"Would you like to know very much?"

"Not if you have a motive in keeping the relation concealed."

"You have surmised whom she might be. Do you suppose she is my wife?"

"No." Tone and manner were positive.

"Who, then?"

Again she shook her head.

"You are a hard customer," he said, half laughing, "but I think a very safe one. You will neither advance or quit an inch without seeing your way. I have quietly contented myself with observing you. I expected after the strangeness wore off, to have you shower questions upon me, and had prepared to stop you suddenly. You have disappointed me, and out

of disappointment interest has sprung up. Perhaps curiosity were a better word, though I dare say you would resent it if I applied it to you. I have never seen a woman who could be placed in so important a position before, without asking questions. You have been surrounded by mystery, and yet never sought to fathom it out. I can't understand you. I want to know more about you. Tell me."

His manner put Ora at ease. She would not gratify him for many reasons.

"You give me the credit for generous forbearance," she answered, "and acquit me of curiosity where you are concerned. Can you not reward it by like forbearance?"

"But I am willing to answer any of your questions. Ask me all you wish."

"I do not want to ask any."

"Because that would give me a right to question you?"

"Yes."

"Then I suppose we must both stumble on still in the dark. I have no idea of one-sided favors. I am *very* curious about you. You are no ordinary woman. You are educated, refined, and possess pride to an intense degree. You are sensitive, too sensitive for rude or humble associations. Yet it puzzles me exceedingly to guess how you, with your mind, personal appearance, general accomplishments and feelings, could have been reduced to the pitiful extremity in which I found you."

This was becoming painful in the extreme. Ora shrank from such close pressing upon still sore wounds.

"You are becoming cruel," she said tremulously "Misfortunes pressed upon me too heavily for my strength. It was no fault that brought me so low."

"Forgive me," he begged frankly. "I do not mean to be unkind or unreasonable. I believe I am in a singular mood this morning. I suppose it arises from the fact that I have just had a nice dish of scandal to discuss at breakfast, fresh from the generous hand of a scandal-loving public."

"Of what nature? As it comes through the public, of course it is not of a private nature," said Ora, only half interested in what he might have found to amuse him, and set him into so teasing and disagreeable a mood.

A moment's dreamy pause; then he answered. "No; nothing private; still, it touches me, because some one I know is mixed up in it. Names are not given, so I will not take license the newspapers forbear to take. That *would* be unkind. It is this. A young man, of not very proper habits, I must confess, has for sometime been engaged to a young lady of this city. She is a physician's daughter, and stands high in the social world. He stands high, also, but his most intimate friends know him to be wild—or rather *knew* him to be wild. Since a recent absence, he has been carrying on a deep game, and kept dark as possible. People began to look on him as a wondrous example of reformation.

"I believe everything run smoothly for a time. What it was that wrought the change, is not known. But lately the match was broken off, and the brother of the girl flew out most furiously in search of the

miscreant lover, determined to wreak vengeance on him for whatever crime he may have committed. The gentleman was not to be found, however. Probably, expecting a storm, he betook himself to shelter in time—he and a bosom friend of his, and were not discovered till yesterday. Here, now, is a choice morsel for the romantically inclined. This blessed young scamp is found concealed in an old rickety house some distance from town, where poor mortals who happen to be in the way of others, have been snapped up and safely caged away on a plea of madness. Splendid institutions these, for a favored land like ours!

Ora shuddered.

“You cannot mean that such places exist here?” she said.

“Yes, here as elsewhere. This place was kept by an old fiend—a Janvrin, or Jarvis, or something of that sort. A number of poor wretches, goaded to the verge of madness, were found there. The man was imprisoned. The captives liberated and placed in proper hands. Amongst them, a woman, this self-same sometime lover is said to have placed there. Why, it is not known. Some whisper that she was his wife, and it may be so, for from the course things have taken, I presume nothing short of such villainy could have brought on the issue we have now to contemplate. To make a long story short, the brother and the lover met in mortal combat. Contrary to the usual rule, the right one fell—the lover was vanquished. He did not live three hours after the encounter, and the victor made good his escape until the affair shall have been hushed up. I am glad of it. I glory in

the boy's spunk. Had it been *my* sister, I should wipe out *any* insult offered her with blood, as he did."

A baleful light flashed from his eyes as he spoke, and for an instant their glance rested upon the invalid. Ora saw both, and a ray of intelligence penetrated her mind for the first time. Why had she never thought of it before? But then, why should they be alone, and so apparently friendless? All was dark as before, after a moment's thought. She did not attempt to clear up the mystery. Her mind was too much absorbed with thoughts to which Mr. Raymond's story had given rise. There were strange evidences that thrilled her through with conjecture. She scarcely dared put the questions that crowded to her lips; yet she could not rest in the suspense of uncertainty. She must satisfy herself.

"And the lady—is nothing said of her further?" she ventured, turning her face away to hide the interest she felt, and feared he might notice.

"Nothing."

"Was she an only daughter?"

"No, there is another, a young girl of twelve. I think, also, there are two wards, a niece and an adopted child. The son was an only son, and like his father, a physician, bidding fair to rise to eminence, if I mistake not. Curse these meddlers, who are never happy out of mischief! Honorable shooting was too good for the fellow. He ought to have been hung like a dog. A murderer of peace and honor is worse than he who takes life. I had rather have a sister of mine die, than to stand in her place—the theme of every gossiping tongue! Yet she, poor girl, is good and inno-

cent. Once, their home circle was an eden. I never remember to have seen one more perfect. What must it be to-day! God! It exasperates me to think of it!"

How fierce and bitter his tone was! How tightly his hand clenched as he spoke. Had he cause for such depth of feeling on such a subject? Looking up, he caught a glimpse of Ora's white lips, and eyes wild as if in affright. He was struck dumb.

"How easily you are frightened," he said, more calmly. "I thought you had more nerve than to be so startled at a little burst of indignation. Madame Nurse, go to your room and keep quiet until I call you. Mind that you get some better color in your face, too, before I want you."

Without waiting further permission, Ora rose and left the room. She was glad to escape his keen glance, just then, for her thoughts were in a whirl, her heart throbbing as though it would burst. She could not doubt that she understood the whole story. Had she done so, the paper she had snatched up from the hall table had set all doubt at rest. There were the initials of all the names, though as Mr. Raymond had said, the names were withheld. They were plain enough to her, and her heart grew sick with its weight of excitement. Bartoni dead! Harry Clifton a fugitive! Lina a broken-hearted girl—an anxious sister! What a wreck of a happy circle, truly! Raymond was right. None had been brighter, and *now* what was it? And he—that man who had been her bane, had proved theirs' also! Something of Theodore Raymond's bitter spirit was stirred within her. Such a death *was* too good for him!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE soft haze of a summer twilight was upon the earth, and its deeper shadows were creeping slowly into the sick chamber. Calmness reigned throughout the house. All things seemed lulled to repose about it. The invalid slept. Since becoming convalescent, she had slept more than half the time, and her guardian grew more quiet and less anxious day after day.

Another week had passed. Since the morning he had imparted the news of Bartoni's death, he had scarcely spoken to her, except to give brief, short orders. He questioned her no more. His visits now were as frequent, but of shorter duration. Once he had said that his time was very much occupied, and after that, vouchsafed nothing further.

On this evening, he came much earlier than usual, and sat talking cheerfully to the invalid till she fell asleep. Then he drew a chair into the piazza in the rear of the building, and sat sometime with his cigar, enjoying the breeze and the repose of things about him.

Presently he put his head inside the door and called softly :

“Nurse, bring a chair out here.”

Rising from the window where she had been sitting, she obeyed. As she stepped upon the piazza,

he took the chair from her hand and carried it to the further end.

“There, sit down.”

She hesitated.

“Is it safe to leave our patient alone?”

“Quite. Else I should not ask you. I want you to myself a little while.

She did not like his tone ; nevertheless she sat down and suffered him to place himself near her.”

“I want you,” he began, “that I may express my sense of obligation for the care you have bestowed upon that poor girl in there. You little know what she has suffered. Did you, your kind heart would break. I thought *I* should go mad sometimes. You have been so faithful, I feel deeply your debtor. I know I have said little, but I have seen and felt it none the less. Will you consent to remain her friend and companion, as long as I may wish?”

“I will remain as long as she needs me.”

“And suppose I should wish to take her away from here? Would you travel with her—go wherever she went, and be everything to her—her true and staunch friend through all things?”

Ora hesitated in painful embarrassment. . How could she promise this without a greater knowledge of the girl she was requested to call her friend—to be ever near her, stand in the light of companion and most intimate associate?

“I would, if I could feel assured—”

Here she broke down. She could not finish such a sentence to *him*. A hot flush mounted to her cheeks, and she was silent.

"Of what? Of your competency? Never fear. I would trust you with the most precious one on earth. I want change for her, and think of sending her to Newport, or Saratoga for a few weeks. As soon as she can travel, I must send her. You can take her there. There is no one else I could trust to do it, and I dare not follow you for a week. You will be very quiet, of course. Will be seen very little. I shall send her there for her health, not society. Poor thing, she will not want that *now*."

He bent his head upon his hands, and sat silent for some minutes. Ora remained quiet, but her mind was in a state of fearful indecision. She wanted to ask him about her history, but remembering the conversation of a week previous, she dared not do it. He relieved her at length.

"I have not dealt altogether fairly with you, Mrs. Meredith. I ought to have told you something definite about our position. I saw that you were perplexed, and I enjoyed it too much to break the charm. I had a desire to see how long you could bear the uncertainty without questioning me. I tried an exchange of confidence once, but failed. I intended to have satisfied you then, but your reticence deterred me. It shall do so no longer. You are at liberty to keep your secrets. I need you—am satisfied that you will do all I wish you to do. I *know* you a fit companion for my sister, and could wish for no better."

His eyes strove to penetrate the dusk, to catch the expression of her face, but could not. He felt her little start, however. She felt as if a weight had rolled from her heart.

"Your sister!" she exclaimed after a moment's silence.

"Yes, my sister. Child, did you not guess it?"

"I have thought so, sometimes. Still, I could not understand how she could be that, and no others near her. Where are your parents, and why do you alone care for her while she has been in such suffering and danger?"

"Ay, why? It is a pitiful story, my little friend,—you are my friend, are you not?—and I can give it you in a few words. My father is a hard, stern man. We two are his only children. She married early, and against his will. She is, unfortunately, self-willed to a high degree. She would listen to no one. Her father discarded her, and six months after her ill-starred marriage, her villainous husband deserted her amongst strangers. The agony of the heartless act, made her ill. She wrote me, begging for aid in her distress. In the impulse of the moment, I took the letter to my father, and tried to intercede for her. I begged that I might bring her home again, poor, repentant sufferer! He flew in a most terrible passion, declared that she should not come to his house again. She had found the fruits of her actions bitter, but she must eat them. I tried to reason with him, reminded him of his duty as a father and a professed Christian—he grew worse than ever. Forbade the mention of her name, and bade me seek her out, and aid her at the peril of being, like her, cast from his home and heart. I am his heir, dependent upon him for all I have. He gave me no profession. A poor, pitiful creature I should be, cast

adrift. I was tempted at first to brave him, for my beautiful sister was my idol. I could not bear to think of her in such distress. But I knew my father well. Had I done so, I should have been cast off penniless, without a ray of hope for the future. In such a position, I could place my sister in but little better circumstances than she was then. It takes time and labor to gain anything. Meantime, she might die. I dropped the subject then and we have not spoken her name in his house since. But I would not let her die. I had her secretly brought here, and all that money could provide, has been given her, all that kindness could do has been done. If I daily deceive them at home, it is not as black as the sin of her banishment. After all, I do not deceive them. They ask me no questions, I have nothing to answer. I pass my time as I like, and make use of my liberty and my money to save her. And I will do it. Poor Ellen! I do not think my mother would be harsh, only for my father. Every soul in his house is his slave, myself excepted. She dare not *think*, except of him and his will. Therefore she is helpless. I will not harass her with the knowledge of this state of affairs. She is ignorant. I will let her remain so. As for my father, the day may come when God will soften his heart to a spark of humanity."

Ora's heart was full of bitter pain.

"Suffering—nothing but suffering everywhere! The earth was full of it. Where could she turn, and find it not? No where, this side the grave."

"Now" he continued, "you understand our rela-

tion and position. You see why I must act carefully. It is more for her sake than my own. If I cause a breach, both of us are hopelessly set adrift. Can I but get along smoothly, I shall have enough for the comfort of both, and I will see that my sister has her full share. Am I right? Can you condemn my course?"

"No. You are justified, knowing the ground on which you stand. I admire your earnest devotion to your poor sister, beyond expression. Could you have the heart to abandon her to the cold world in sickness and poverty? You are right in all you have done."

"I knew you would say so. I could not do otherwise. It would be foolish to recklessly cast away the means of helping her by braving my father. But it would be damnable to desert her, and selfishly revel in her portion while she starved. God! to think of it!"

He was strangely excitable at times, and these exclamations seemed much at variance with his general manner. He was not profane. A deep under current of religious sentiment ran through his nature. But he did not evince it in his father's way. It proved itself in daily practice of good and generous works. He assumed nothing. Sincere, generous and charitable, he never refused aid to the suffering. If there was a blemish in the character of Theodore Raymond, it consisted in the deep bitterness to which his father's injustice gave rise. It was contempt and disdain for small, pitiful deeds, while wearing the outward garb of one who "walks with God." The

elder Raymond, a hard, cruel, and at heart unfeeling man, was an object of contempt to his child—almost of hatred.

This is hardly to be called unnatural, reader. From infancy, he had known him but as a tyrant. Before the world he saw him stand as one “chosen of the Lord.” In the home circle, he knew him guilty of deeds, any generous, upright man would shun as a pestilence, and he knew him for a hypocrite. To one just and high principled as Theodore, such characters could but be repugnant, even though of his own flesh and blood.

“I dare say you think very strangely of me,” he remarked to Mrs. Meredith after awhile. “I ought to beg your pardon for my vehemence. But it half maddens me sometimes. I am forced into a position most painful, for one of my feelings. Were I alone interested, I should not fear to launch boldly upon the tide, and steer my course alone amongst life’s breakers. I have thought often, that I would prefer it. But to do this would not save my poor sister, and it would certainly break my mother’s heart. I have no right to disregard her happiness. Her trials are heavy, already, poor mother! What a troublesome world we live in,” he sighed out at the close.

“Yes, I have found it so.”

Ora answered the exclamation half dreamily; but there was a thrill of sadness in her tone which made her listener cast another piercing glance toward her face. It was veiled so deeply, however, that the expression was lost in darkness.

"Come into the house," said he rising abruptly. "It is too damp for you out here. You will be taking cold."

Ora rose and followed him, wondering at the apparent inconsistencies of the young man's character. He was growing more and more authoritative, and even brusque, as he began to know her, or rather get used to her. Yet she knew him at heart kind and gentle as a woman. She had seen him so in his manner. If this was assumed, for what purpose was it? It puzzled her to conjecture.

On this evening, Mr. Raymond went away earlier than usual, even as he had come. And also, after a long conversation with Ellen, who woke before he left, took leave of the nurse in a new style. He called her out as he went, on pretence of giving some orders concerning his sister. When at the door, he paused and stood on the steps several minutes. The moon had risen, and fell in a broad glare over the front of the building. His bared head was lifted proudly—his white brow bathed in the silvery beams. Ora thought he looked very noble and handsome as he stood there, his eyes fixed upon the shining constellations above.

"I think you need not sit up, to-night, Mrs. Meredith," he said, at length, turning to her. "Ellen is so much better that the girl's attendance will be all she wants. I must guard your health in order to keep you. If I allow you to wear yourself out, then we might lose you. After this I must not stay. I would, if necessary, but it is not, since the danger is past, and it is important for me to be at home.

Father begins already to show signs of displeasure at my actions, though he seldom interferes with me in anyway. I must be guarded. Will you retire early and leave the girl to attend Ellen?"

"Certainly not."

"No? Why, pray?"

"Because it would not be right. She may be out of danger; still it is my duty to be near her while still so weak and ill. She is helpless, as yet."

"But you may get sick."

"I do not fear it, and I hope I am not so selfish as to shun my duty on so slight a pretext. I do not love ease quite so well as that."

"Hush! who thought of such a thing!"

His tone was almost contemptuous, but he looked pleased. Then he said in a voice very different from the first, it was so gentle and earnest:

"You are kind. My sister will one day be your staunch friend. Perhaps you may need her, too. I imagine you have few enough. You may count me one, however, always, if I may claim the title. May I?"

"You are too good," was the tremulous response. A chord of feeling vibrated to the earnest, manly sympathy of his tone.

"I shall feel glad to know you such, most assuredly."

She had only uttered frankly what she felt.

"Thank you. Now, my little Nurse, I must leave you. Have Jane bring a cot in Ellen's room, and do you rest there. I don't like to have you sit up all night, as I think you intend to do."

‘It will not hurt me.’

“It might. You are not strong.”

“I have been well cared for, however. You employ me to nurse, and take all the heavy night watches on yourself. More than this, I am satisfied, and that is a great deal. Physical labor is as nothing to an overtaxed heart and brain.”

“Then your mind and heart are at rest, you would imply? I am glad.”

“As near rest as a wanderer’s can be,” she answered sadly. “I have lost home and friends. Still, there is an air of peace and security under your roof that is soothing. I should have died without this haven into which a kind Providence allowed my barque to drift.”

“Ah! you make me feel thankful. I have sometimes wondered how you felt, but feared to ask you. I hope you may find it always a congenial atmosphere where we dwell. You will at least find friendly spirits. Now I will not keep you out here. Good night.”

He held out his hand and clasped her’s kindly. His tone and manner were almost tender. The look he gave at the “good-night” almost meaning in its depth. Ora faltered out a response and hastily closed the door. Her heart was in a strange flutter. Something in the change disturbed her. Yet she could not have told why. He had been only kind—very kind. But the sharpest critic could not have discovered more than mere interest in his manner. Any one, with but humane feeling, might have acted the same. Yet it disturbed her deeply.

Ellen's large eyes were wide open when Ora entered the room. She seemed now quite indisposed to go to sleep again, and soon began to toss restlessly.

"Oh, this is wearying work," she moaned faintly. "I wonder if I shall ever learn patience to endure meekly all that I feel?"

Ora sat down near her, taking in hers both wasted little hands.

"Are you in pain, dear?"

"Yes, but not bodily. I cannot help thinking, and when I do, my heart and brain get on fire. Oh, why are some people doomed to bring sorrow to all they love, while others—why was *I* born?"

A cry like this a hundred times had forced its way from Ora's lips. She had wailed out in her bitter agony, and cried "why was I born?" She could comprehend the feelings that gave birth to the plaint. She could sincerely pity the poor girl before her, of whose wretched life she had heard from the lips of the brother. With quivering lips she stooped over her with a strong impulse of sympathy, clasped the frail form in her arms, and hushed the sobs that shook it, as she would a child's. Wisely she forbore words. The little tempest soon spent itself. The tears ceased, but the poor suffering heart, pining for sympathy, could not carry its weary load alone.

"Theodore told you all about me," she said at length, more calmly. "I once felt afraid to speak. The wounds in my heart are so deep, I shrink from baring them to mortal eyes. But sometimes I have wanted my mother, and longed so wildly for her bosom to pillow my head, that I have thought of

taking you into my confidence—of telling you everything, that I might have your sympathy. I thought you could in a measure supply her place, for I dared not send to her. Oh, nurse, you are a woman and know my sorrow—you can pity me!”

“Pity you! from my soul I do!” she breathed earnestly, tenderly clasping her close to her bosom, and smoothing back the tangled tresses from the broad forehead. Tears were silently coursing down her cheeks and falling upon the pillow. ‘Ah, could she *not* feel?’ Every heart throb of pain was more than answered by her own. Hers was old in sorrow.

“How much better for all, could I have died,” murmured Ellen, sadly. “Now I must live an outcast from my father’s dwelling, bereft of his love, barred from my mother by his will, as effectually as though the grave indeed enclosed me. A burthen upon my brother—a curse to myself! Ah! why could I not die?”

“Hush! this is rebellious! Your present pain exaggerates your view of your condition. Your father is but human, and has human weaknesses. His will is not too strong to break before the tide of natural affection. He may relent, and you be called to return to his arms. Do you imagine that anything is permitted to fall upon us thus heavily, without a purpose in it? Good to all may spring from this blow. Be patient. God is very merciful.”

“How can it be, when he sees us so helpless in His hand, and yet sends us sufferings greater than we can bear. Oh! I can see no mercy in it! He

makes us weak, and then punishes us for our weakness !”

“Ellen ! were you less excited, you would not utter such words as those you have spoken ! Calm yourself, dear. I cannot let you get so nervous. You will be ill again. Another time, when you are stronger, I will point out to you many blessings and mercies which you overlook in your present state of mind.”

“Point them out to me now. They may serve to calm me. I see nothing but darkness and misery—not one ray of merciful light. I cannot see for what purpose I have been created. I have known nothing but bitterness all my life. A brief period of infatuation dazzled me—I was intoxicated with the strange new joy that dawned upon me. Shut out all my life from the fountains of natural affection, you may guess how eagerly I drank of the proffered cup when it was held to my lips by one who seemed a very Apollo in his magnificent beauty. Ah ! how soon I reached the dregs ! They have tintured every drop of my blood with their poison, and will eventually end my miserable existence by lashing it to maniac fury !”

“You must not think of this so intensely. Bad it is, but it might have been worse. You have suffered the bitter pangs of disappointment—seen, as have many others, your idol shattered to worthless dust at your feet. Nevertheless, it is yours to ignore the past, and rise in the future to a happier existence. Experience comes to us in a dark and fearful guise, sometimes. Yet the lessons she brings, are of more

than golden value. You are young yet, very young and fair. Health will soon return and give bloom to your cheek and light to your eye. You will gain with your strength, new hopes and aspirations. As you go out into the world again, you will find new scenes and occupations, and will have the advantage of this experience of your life to guide you over dangerous grounds. Every trial comes to us for good; believe it and be hopeful."

"Ah! it is easy for those to speak as you do, who have not had their idols shattered! their fairest hopes crushed and trampled beyond restoration. Had you ever suffered as I have, you could not talk to me in this strain, and so calmly!"

A sad smile played over the features of the nurse. She was half tempted to tell her the story of a love lost—an idol shattered—of years of suffering, toil and disgrace, of a little head lying beneath the sod to-night under the pale stars, and a heart desolate with all this, striving hopefully to rise and send to the lips a word of comfort for the little being clasped in her arms.

Hours elapsed ere Ellen yielded to slumber. Ora tried almost vainly to soothe and quiet the excited nerves of her patient. Restless and feverish, she tossed, moaned and wailed, until a fear rose strongly of a relapse into the illness from which she was recovering. Relief came at last. The eyes closed, and the panting breast heaved only to gentle respiration. Thankfully — prayerfully, Ora smoothed the drapery around the bed, and then laid down upon the couch beside the sufferer to watch till morning.

CHAPTER XXV.

"You have not closed your eyes since I left you," was Mr. Raymond's salutation. "I see you are on a par with the whole race of womankind."

"In what respect?"

"Contrariness!"

Ora laughed lightly, but Ellen said for her, quickly and eagerly:

"She is not contrary, brother, If she did not sleep, the fault was mine. I got wild and restless last night. I must have worried her dreadfully."

"What made you restless?"

"You know, without the necessity of repeating," she answered quietly. "I had been thinking, while you were at the door, and knowing you had told her about it, I gave vent to my pent up feelings, and it was hours before she got me quiet. It has done me good, though. I feel better for her sympathy. I am glad she knows all."

"Blessed institutions after all," said Theodore with a merry smile. Ora looked up and questioned:

"What?"

"Women. Give me a woman to soothe and comfort. They take the roughest, most jagged points and smooth them to things of beauty and loveliness, even."

"How inconsistent you are, sir."

“Not at all. I called you contrary because you disobeyed a particular order. Now I call you a blessed institution for having done what no man could have done at such a time. Even I, her brother, could not have soothed her in one of those fits. She would have worn herself out, and to-day been at death’s door again, most likely. As it is, she is better than before, and rejoicing over womanly sympathy. Good!”

Ora said no more on the subject. A look similar to his parting look of last night, brought a troubled light into her eyes, which she turned her face from him to conceal. And yet the next moment, stealing a glance at his face as he sat talking to Ellen, she condemned herself for foolish fancies. He had grown so utterly oblivious of her presence, looked so quietly unconscious of everything save the invalid sister under his care, she even began to smile at herself for being so silly as to feel disturbed at all.

Yet we may not wonder that her senses were ever on the alert, and that she constantly scanned her path for the shadows lying across it. She had suffered enough to make her far-seeing and cautious.

That same day, all arrangements being fully discussed for the proposed trip, Ora set about arranging the wardrobes for Ellen and herself. The former’s was rich and ample. She should want but few things. In the absence of his parents, Theodore had gone to the room once belonging to his sister, now locked and forbidden premises, and taken out all he thought she might need—himself packing them and sending off the trunks by porters he brought for the purpose.

For herself Ora needed but little. She wore simple black always. A short time from the beginning of preparations, everything was complete.

The first of July found them installed in comfortable rooms at Saratoga. Theodore had written some time previously to engage them, and when able to travel, sent Ellen and Ora to take possession. She was to keep him advised of the patient's progress by letter; he would not follow till the first of August unless Ellen should grow worse.

The rooms were large and commodious, commanding a pretty view from the windows. Two bedrooms and a parlor finely furnished and communicating. Ellen looked pleased, almost happy as she surveyed the elegant furniture. The light shone so pleasantly in upon them as they sat in the parlor, and there was a fine piano and a guitar standing just as her own stood before she became a fugitive from love and home. How thoughtfully careful had Theodore been of his wilful, erring sister! Tears filled the large eyes and dropped over the wan cheeks, even while she smiled, and she exclaimed fervently:

"Oh, nurse, I feel the truth of which you have so often spoken, more forcibly at this moment than I have ever felt. God *is* merciful, in spite of my unworthiness. See what a blessing he gives me in my dear, kind brother! Oh, what would become of me without him!"

"God would find means of caring for you still," was the reply. "He who numbers the hairs of our heads, and 'suffers not a sparrow to fall to the ground,' will surely guard a soul He loves, and keep it for His

own glory. Who knows how much you may yet do for His sake?"

Everything was strange about them, yet they found no time for loneliness. A well stored book case supplied them with reading matter, and Ora divided the hours as best suited the taste of the invalid. Sometimes she read aloud for her, and when she tired, she conversed with, or played for her. A proficient in music, the pleasure she gave was beyond description. It needed one to catch the sweet, rich tones of her voice, to understand the ecstatic thrill, music can give. We have spoken often before of this glorious gift. Now it was destined to prove a source of both pleasure and annoyance.

It was Ora's delight ever, to sit at the piano in the evening hour, breathing softly the airs she best loved. Ellen was weary, and retired early. Ora could not go so soon, and Ellen begged her to play. Only snatches of song came to her lips at first. One after another, she skimmed lightly over for half an hour. But the soul of music was being stirred within her. Soon she took up deeper, richer strains, giving to her voice its full scope and power. It thrilled the night hour, and hushed the sounds of more discordant notes by oversweeping them with its mighty waves. One by one, strollers gathered beneath the balconies of their room. The couples paused in their promenades. Light vehicles were whirling by whose occupants seeing the groups gathered there, drew in reins and listened entranced, while the unconscious songstress poured out those sublime notes that would have won laurels of fame for a prima donna. Ora

always felt, when she sung thus. She was trembling from excess of it now, when she rose and parting the curtains lightly, stood upon the balcony. A moment she breathed the fresh air, drinking in the beauty of the summer night, when suddenly her eye caught the dispersing crowd beneath her. She would have given it no second thought, perhaps, had not a murmur reached her ear, out of which the words came to her distinctly:

“A fine voice! man alive! it is superb, sublime! Who can it be, I wonder? I would give the world for a sight of the lips from which strains like those can issue! She must be beautiful! Will she sing again? Listen!”

The voice ceased, and Ora shrank back within the room. To deny that she knew of whom they spoke, would have been affectation, and that was a quality she did not possess. A thrill passed through her heart—a thrill of pleasure. This was a gift for which she was fervently thankful. She was less miserable when she could exercise it freely.

This was but the beginning of the excitement she was destined to create. Ellen loved to hear her sing, and she would not refuse to gratify her. Evening after evening, the sweet tones filled the room, and were wafted out upon the night to the ears that grouped round to catch the strains.

She knew that crowds were invariably attracted there, but she had no fear. No one would dare to come to their apartments, and they never stirred from them except in a close carriage to take a drive. Then both were closely veiled. No danger of

either being recognized, even were they not among strangers.

This monotonous life was becoming wearisome, however. Ora longed for some change. At times she grew so restless as to find the confinement almost intolerable, and one evening after Ellen fell asleep, ventured to descend to the 'Ladies' Reception Room. She dared not go into the parlor; that was thronged with gay visitors, and in her sable robes, with her quiet, mournful face, unattended, also, as she was, she would have seemed out of place. She found a serene pleasure, however, in looking about her; it seemed like a brief respite from the walls of a prison, to get into another part of the house.

Through the open doors and windows, came floating in gay bursts of laughter, mingled with music. A pair of swift hands swept the keys of the piano in the parlor, separated from her by a wide hall. Standing near the open door, she observed a hush in the murmur of the many voices, and then a merry little air was executed with great spirit. Merriment followed it. There was a buzz and clamor at the end, then another song with greater spirit still, told the effect of admiration upon the songstress. Ora thought the voice very clear and sweet. A fancy of familiarity made her steal into the hall and glance toward the piano. There was a group around it, but through a little parting she saw a dark, sparkling face wreathed in smiles. The shining black hair glittered in the heavy coils wound around the head in fantastic fashion. The eyes blazed and flashed; the round cheek wore a carnation flush. The ruby lips parted to disclose teeth

that shone in pearl-like whiteness. There was no mistaking the figure or features. She had to lean against the wall to keep from falling, as the increasing throng shut out the vision.

Her head swam, her heart ached as she turned back to her room. No one noticed the little slender figure as she glided away and up the broad stairway. Had they done so, they might have been startled at the livid hue of her face. It looked as if the hand of death had smitten her.

As one in a frightful dream, she glided on to her room, and throwing herself upon the couch without undressing, turned her face to the pillow and lay still. Hours sped unheeded. It was near morning ere a stir gave signs of life to the still form. Then the floodgates of feeling were raised, and violent sobs shook her from head to foot. She wept long and passionately, burying her face deep in the pillows, lest a sound should reach Ellen's ears, and startle her into questions she might not answer.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE last of July brought Mr. Raymond. He had got away earlier than he expected, and brought with him some stirring news, especially for Ellen.

"Father and mother are coming on," he said, after the first salutation had passed between them.

"Papa and mamma! Oh, brother, what brings them here—what shall we do?"

Theodore laughed at her alarm.

"Well, to answer your first question, father's health is giving way, and he must have change. Mother accompanies him, and they will make a short tour of all the watering places. It is easy enough for us to get along. The proprietor of the hotel is in my confidence, and you can merely keep your room the few days they may remain. There is no danger of their finding you out. I proposed preceding them by a day or two, to engage rooms and look about a little. I shall have to go with them, perhaps, from here. Don't look so blank, Ellen. I can manage an excuse to leave them somewhere else, and rejoin you shortly."

"Oh, Theodore—"

"Well, what is it, dear?"

"It seems so hard—"

"What seems hard?"

"Why, that my dear mother should come so near me—live under the same roof, and I dare not go to

her—dare not see or speak to her for a moment, but hide myself like a criminal from her sight.”

Ellen covered her face with her thin hands, and Theodore’s face showed signs of emotion he could not conceal. Gently drawing the little hands away, he kissed her wet cheek tenderly.

“Do not think of it, Ellen. I know it is hard, dear sister, but the cloud will pass. The time may soon come when you can go back to mother’s arms and heart as of old.”

Ellen looked up quickly. A singular light was in her brother’s eyes.

“What do you mean, Theodore?” she asked half-under her breath. “Why do you say this—why do you look so?”

“Cannot you think?”

He regarded her steadily.

“No, brother,” but her cheek paled in spite of the denial.

“Mother has always loved and pitied you. She dared not show it because of his unbending will. Were he gone, what would hinder her acting as feeling dictates?”

“Then you think—you think—”

She faltered painfully.

“I think our father will not live long,” answered Theodore in a low tone, but very calmly.

Again Ellen’s face dropped in her hands.

“Oh, God forgive me,” she murmured penitently. “Theodore, our father’s tyranny and unnatural hardness of heart against us, has almost made me *hate* him. Oh, I pray God forgive me!”

The brother made no reply. His knit brow told of dark thoughts as he sat with eyes bent upon the carpet. Evidently the sister's sentiments were felt as deeply by himself. Whether her penitence, is not known.

During this conversation Ora had withdrawn with a book into one of the farthest windows. Though a confidant in their painful position, her delicacy of feeling prompted her to leave them to discuss it freely, unrestrained by her presence. She could not leave the parlor. As the next best thing, she chose the window, and drew the curtain about her.

The pause that followed Ellen's last outburst was broken by a stifled cry from Ora's retreat. Without stopping to think, Theodore rose and crossed the room to her side. As he drew back the curtains, she turned her face as far from him as possible, to hide its agonized expression, striving to reply calmly to his question, as to what had caused the exclamation.

"That lady startled me as she mounted that fiery horse. She is daring!"

Theodore looked out with interest, accepting the explanation as the whole cause, and smiling at her fright.

"How timid you women are," he said, "that is, as a general thing. This lady appears to be an exception. By the way, she sits that animal well. He is of good mettle. See how he paws the ground with his impatient hoofs, and tosses his mane angrily to one side, while she sits unconscious of his wrath. A beautiful creature. By Jupiter! I scarcely know

which is most magnificent—the horse or his fair young rider !”

Ora’s heart heaved a heavy throb of dull, stinging pain. Ellen, attracted by her brother’s exclamations of admiration, joined them at the window and stood looking out.

The groom had led up a number of horses, and one lady was mounted. A group of gentlemen were near, equipped for mounting also, as soon as their ladies should be safely placed in the saddle. One after another they assumed them, the lady first served holding in the reins steadily, and patiently waiting, though her steed champed his bit and moved restlessly about. Her dark green habit was flowing gracefully about her, the white feather of her hat drooping softly over her crimsoned cheeks. Shining coils of raven black hair fell at the back of her head, half resting upon the white neck it adorned. The very embodiment of spirit and elegance she appeared. Theodore had eyes only for her beauty, praising her enthusiastically, until the whole mounted party wheeled and dashed away.

Ora turned to leave the windows, but Mr. Raymond barred her exit. He looked laughingly in her face.

“I declare, you are pale yet! Who would have thought you so nervous?”

Hot, crimson waves dyed her cheeks, and it was on her lips to deny that she had been frightened. A moment’s reflection sealed her answer, however. If not fright, he would want to know what it was that had paled her cheeks and dilated the pupils of her eye in that fashion. She could not answer him, so

she must let him believe her weak and timid as a child. The thought was galling—the more so as a quiet glance showed the light smile of badinage replaced by a half-contemptuous curl of the handsome lips. Resentment rose to her aid, then. With an erect head and firm step, she passed from the room to her own chamber. Then, for the second time after looking at that fair young face, she buried herself among the pillows of the couch and wept bitterly, first having turned the key of her door to keep out chance intruders.

After witnessing Ora's exit with his slyly mischievous glance, Theodore turned to his sister, saying lightly:

"I wonder if I really offended Mrs. Meredith? I hope not. I would not like to think so, for she is a good, gentle creature. But tell me, Ellen, why *are* you women so afraid of animals? The sight of a horse or a cow frightens the life out of you."

"Not quite so bad as that," said Ellen, laughingly. "I don't believe Mrs. Meredith is afraid of them. I have heard her express fondness for animals, and once she told me she had been used to horseback exercise in her childhood, and even after she grew up had ridden frequently, having resided in the country and kept horses."

"Then why did she turn so white and shake like an aspen when that lady mounted her 'mettled charger?' I'm inclined to the belief that she's a regular little coward. Some day I'll try her just for the fun of it. By the way, would you not like a ride on horseback, Sis? Seriously, are you strong enough?"

"O, I would like it very much, but brother, I can't go."

"Why not?"

"There are several reasons. In the first place, we must attract no unnecessary attention."

"We need not. This season, equestrianism is too common for a quiet little party to become conspicuous. We could ride out without any one dreaming who you are."

"Well, even were that so, I have no habit—neither has Mrs. Meredith."

"A woman's excuse, but easily remedied. You can hire one."

"O brother! one anybody can wear for the asking? No, I couldn't do that!"

"Why, you fastidious little puss! Why are you so particular?"

"They would not fit us, even were they nice?" returned Ellen. "I think we will not discuss the matter further."

"But," urged the brother pleasantly, "I should really like to take you before father and mother get here. Have you no tight-fitting jackets you could wear with a skirt?"

Ellen mused a moment.

"Yes, you managed to get hold of a portion of my winter wardrobe when you made that foraging expedition on my account. There is a bottle green waist of cloth, and a black velvet basque in my trunk. But of what use can they be without skirts?"

"None, that I know. But skirts can be made. Where are the waists?"

"I will get them."

Ellen went into her chamber and in a few minutes came back with the articles in question.

"Your dresses fit Mrs. Meredith, do they not?" was his next question.

"Yes, pretty nearly."

"Then its settled! I'll go and buy stuff to match these articles in color, and the maid shall sew them up for you this afternoon. It will not take long, and you can have your ride to-morrow morning."

"But, brother—" She was not allowed to remonstrate, however. He siezed her little pale face in his hands, and holding it up, kissed the pretty lips heartily and ran away. Her laughing conclusion of the interrupted sentence followed him:

"I think it was a great mistake you were not a woman. I am sure," she added to herself, "you excel me in devising 'ways and means.'"

Theodore soon returned, followed by a boy with a parcel. In a very easy, matter-of-fact way, he gave necessary orders about the making, very much to Ellen's amusement, and after seeing the skirts fairly begun, sauntered off to enjoy his cigar.

As he went out, Ellen determined to strive to conciliate Ora, and accordingly tapped lightly on her door. There was no answer. She knocked again, and this time hearing no reply, went away quite serious.

"You have done mischief, I fear," she said apprehensively, as Theodore returned to prepare for dinner.

"How?"

"Mrs. Meredith has not yet made her appearance, and refuses to answer my raps at her door."

Theodore looked half-disturbed.

"I am sure I don't mean to offend her. I hope I have not, seriously."

Singularly enough, Ora in her quiet dignity and innate refinement, had won upon their feelings and respect, in spite of the disadvantages under which Mr. Raymond had found her. The thought of having hurt or offended her, made both unhappy. They waited impatiently for her to show herself.

She came at length, very pale, but calm and gentle as usual. Her manner ignored the little event of the morning. Had she shown in the slightest degree a remembrance of it, Theodore would have hastened to apologize and restore their usual happy flow of feeling and intercourse. As it was, he could not approach her. He saw her determined to let it pass. Ellen, more impulsive, broke forth regretfully:

"Dear Mrs. Meredith, I hope you will forget brother's thoughtlessness. He didn't mean to offend you. We are so sorry!"

"Sorry, my dear? for what?"

Ora's eyes looked genuine surprise, as she replied in her soft, gentle tones, "you have nothing to apologize for."

"Except my rudeness to you this morning," said Theodore, frankly. "I beg you will forgive me, Mrs. Meredith."

"I remember nothing against you," returned Ora. "I never thought of feeling offended."

"Then why shut yourself pertinaciously in your

room all day, and refuse all company?" he said bluntly.

Ora's face crimsoned.

"In the first place, I am not well to-day, and something weighs upon my spirits. I was scarcely fit for society, and feeling it, withdrew."

Her look and tone silenced him. He had no right to ask the cause of the weight upon her spirits. Having disclaimed feeling offended with him, he must accept her explanation without further words, but he was puzzled and dissatisfied. The feeling of wonder and displeasure deepened when the contemplated ride was broached, and Ora protested strongly against it. She should be pleased to see them go, but she did not feel inclined to accompany them.

"Indeed you must go. Brother got it up chiefly on your account, I know," said Ellen, earnestly. Opposition made both enthusiastic. She now wished it as much as Theodore could. Ora smiled.

"Why should he be anxious that I should go? To see if I am afraid of horses? I am not timid."

"Prove it then by going with us to-morrow," he answered, glancing at her face to note its changes. The color again rose to her cheeks. The repugnance to this public airing amounted almost to pain, and still more and more puzzled to understand her apparently groundless opposition and varying color, he made the care of Ellen a necessity for her presence, in case she should get fatigued and faint. Seeing it useless to contend, she at last yielded a quiet concession to their wishes, and with her promise to go, the subject dropped.

The space of time intervening was one of perplexity and anxiety to Ora. Might she not meet *her*, if she ventured beyond her room. Might not *he* be there, and if so, might she not come in contact with *him*? Since the first night on which the discovery was made of her presence, she had been more careful than ever, never daring to leave her room or put her foot beyond the floor that contained their suite. The question of his presence, she would have given worlds to solve, but she dared not attempt it. With no confidant to aid her, and her fears of making herself known, she was completely barred from all means of gaining the desired information.

Once, before that morning, she had caught a glimpse of the lady of the green habit, and her mind had been distracted by the questions that rose. She must not put herself forward to see—she dared not trust herself to meet her and ascertain who was with her, or anything more concerning her, than the simple fact that she was there—evidently a favored, courted belle. If *he* was near, he kept himself closely secluded, yet she rather inclined to the belief that he was not with her. Would he come? Where was he now? Would Fate, strange, capricious and cruel, cross their paths once more! She clasped her hands in agony. “Oh! Heaven forbid! spare me this last trial!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE morning chosen for the riding excursion dawned bright and clear. The fresh air was redolent with perfume; the merry birds twittering a glad welcome to the new day. Theodore rose by sunrise and sauntered out for a walk, while the ladies, after a light breakfast, were preparing for the ride. They proposed going some distance into the country, halting for rest and lunch, rambling through the woods till weary, and returning in the cool part of the evening. He was anticipating much pleasure, as he looked abroad. He remembered how childishly fond Ellen was of her freedom, and longed to see the dancing light of her dark eyes, and the color once more glowing in her pale cheeks, as of old. If he had other motives, they were not predominant on this morning, until a little incident made them so.

As he strolled leisurely away enjoying his cigar and the balmy morning air, a sudden turn in the road brought him face to face with two gentlemen with whom he had become slightly acquainted since his arrival. Both lifted their hats politely, suspending an animated conversation as he approached them, and greeting him pleasantly.

"I am glad to have met you, Mr. Raymond," said one of them in a cordial, easy way. "We are going to have some fine sport to-day, and would like you to

join us. It is to be a ride—a picnic in the grove, and return home by moonlight. We shall have music and the most delightful society of Saratoga. The young Richmond belle makes one of the party. Will you go?"

"Surely, if it were possible, I have inducements enough offered me," smiled Theodore. "I should like to join you, but I have an engagement to ride with a couple of ladies to-day, one of whom is an invalid, and I fear unable to bear much fatigue. I thank you, but I must decline."

"O, do not do so," put in the other gentleman. "There is no necessity of declining on those grounds. Take your ladies with you by all means, and if the delicate one should need rest, leave her for an hour or two at the farm house close by. With the second, you can join us for a little while and have fine sport."

Theodore thought a moment, and decided after a question.

"What time do you start?"

"At ten."

"Then I will join you after you get there. I shall start much earlier to get the benefit of the morning's freshness. It will be less fatiguing. You may count on seeing me for a short time at least, among you."

"Very well, sir; shall be most happy. I wish you a pleasant ride. Good morning."

Both gentlemen lifted their hats, and separated. Theodore took another turn through the grounds, and then bent his steps back to his hotel.

"The Richmond belle," he mused as he sauntered

on. Doubtless that is the sparkling little lady of the Green Habit. I will get an introduction to her if it is!"

Suddenly another thought struck him. He laughed a little to himself as he indulged it.

"It will be interesting to see what Mrs. Meredith will do if I can bring about a meeting without much danger. I would really like to know what the mystery is that lies in that quarter, for a mystery there is, I am certain."

Ellen and Ora were ready when he reached the house, and the groom was waiting his orders to lead up the horses. Ellen mounted first, gleeful and happy as a child to find herself once more able to go out. Ora descended the steps slowly, reluctantly, glancing round to see if strange eyes were observing her. Mr. Raymond noticed it, and mentally wondered whether she feared being seen because of inexperience in riding, or because she wished to avoid observation from other motives. He smiled a little doubtfully as she approached her horse with a shy, half shrinking manner. She caught the glance and read it instantly, but betrayed no knowledge of the fact by a single look. Advancing quietly, she took the reins in her right hand, and with them, placed it on the saddle, catching her habit lightly up with the left. She did not hesitate when he held out his hand, but placing her little foot in his palm, mounted quickly and easily.

Mr. Raymond's eyes lighted with admiration not unmixed with surprise, but quietly arranged her dress as she took the mane with her left hand and lifted herself in the saddle for the purpose. The

next moment he had vaulted into the saddle himself, and they started in nice order.

Ora sat her horse well. Ellen and her brother silently and admiringly acknowledged the exceeding grace of her slender figure, set off by the close fitting black habit. She had never in her life appeared so well to them—never looked more the lady—well bred, elegant and accomplished, than she did at that moment.

Ellen's spirits rose as the warm blood in her veins began to circulate with the exercise. She rode fearlessly and rapidly in the face of her brother's entreaties to spare her strength. With a gay, laughing reply, she dashed on, they following.

Ora's thick veil was down, and concealed her features; but Mr. Raymond knew by instinct that she was as joyous as his sister, though more quiet. He was musing upon what was to come. The test of her horsemanship had proved satisfactory. She had not declined from fear or inexperience. He at once concluded that it was the fear of meeting the strange lady whose face had been sufficient to drive all color from her face the moment her eyes rested on her. He was thinking of her cry of astonishment, her livid lips, and her seclusion for hours on the day previous, and surmised rightly that no ordinary circumstances could have produced such an effect. His interest grew upon him as he pondered the matter, grew and deepened because of the hold she had taken upon his mind. Young, beautiful, highly accomplished, and yet enveloped in mystery as to her past; preserving a rigid silence on all that

pertained to her previous history, you will not wonder, if Mr. Raymond's curiosity got the better of him, and his more noble and generous feelings were submerged in the desire to know what she had refused to tell him. He argued that he had a right to know who his sister's companion and friend was. A lady she had ever been; that he acknowledged. A thought of evil in connection with her, returned to him, glancing from her purity and innate dignity, as shafts from a bright surface of steel.

Perhaps Mr. Raymond had no right now to think and plan a revelation, after acting upon his impulsive feelings and taking her unquestioned into his service and his confidence, from the midst of unfavorable circumstances. Had he cared less for her, still possessing the respect she inspired, he would have gone on quietly, suffering her to keep her own secrets unmolested or disturbed, within her own bosom. As it was, he grew daily more interested in her singular, yet beautiful character, and as its originality and depth became apparent, he found himself studying, comparing her with others; puzzling over her history, and in a fair way to lose himself in the growing and absorbing interest of his observation and speculation.

How singular that he, like another, should thus think and plan against her. Different feelings were the mainspring of action, yet the result must be the same. Harry Clifton had thus thought, plotted, and exposed her in the end; Theodore Raymond was following in his wake, only to meet a like fate, and find out too late that he had worked out his own misery.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FOUR hours later, Ellen found herself comfortably settled on a lounge in a farm house, after having run about till she was tired. Theodore laid peremptory commands on her, and after quaffing a glass of the housewife's cool sweet milk, she prepared for a sleep and rest.

Ora proposed to remain beside her, but both of them vetoed the proposal instantly. Mr. Raymond must have a companion in his further rambles, and Ellen could not sleep if he or she were deprived of any enjoyment that was to be obtained. So, overruled by the majority, she readily donned her hat and started forth.

Their path led through green meadows into the forest, whither Theodore bent his steps in search of the picnic party. Ora tossed back her veil as they entered beneath the shade of the trees, and walked on with a quick, elastic step. Something in the scene roused old remembrances. Her color rose; her lips quivered. She forgot her quiet reserve, and became almost as enthusiastic as Ellen had been.

"Dear old woods!" she cried as she gazed around her. "How ye remind me of old, familiar scenes of my childhood! Many a day I have rambled over rock and brook, revelling in the wild feeling of freedom with Nature, as now. Do you know, Mr. Raymond, I

feel like a different being just now! I have left my old self behind me. I am just as you might have found me years ago, when the woods were my daily companions!"

"Then you love Nature?"

"As a mother, I love her!" was the fervent reply.

"Has it been long since you were in the forest—since you enjoyed a scene like this?"

"Very long."

Her head half drooped with her answer. Sadness was mixed deeply with the joy it called up. "It has been five or six years. Life's duties in that time have been rigid. The hot, teeming city claimed me her servant, and my work might not be abandoned. I am glad to come out again into the world of space, where thought and pleasure can walk hand in hand peacefully. Oh! I am glad!"

They had reached a little dell where a brook ran bubbling and splashing over the stones. Ora threw herself down upon a mossy rock, nestling with loving joy against the giant body of a grand old oak, as she would have nestled against the bosom of a mother. She threw down her hat, suffering the breeze to fan her brow at will, and drawing her glove from her hand, idly dipped the tips of her fingers in the sparkling water. Theodore sat down near her, commanding by her position, a full view of her face. She appeared to him in a new light to-day. Happiness, tinged even with sadness as it was, gave her a different aspect. The picture he contemplated was fascinating. He became complimentary and poetical.

"What a subject for an artist!" he exclaimed. "If

one were near, he might make his name and fortune sure, if he were only skillful enough to give life to the work of art as I see it at this moment in nature! You should see yourself as I see you, Mrs. Meredith—”

Ora laughed lightly, interrupting him.

“ ‘ O, wad some power o’ giftie gie us,
To see oursels as ithers see us.’ ”

she quoted. “ Is it not *apropos*, Mr. Raymond?”

He continued as if he had not been interrupted, “ you would be charmed with yourself. Enjoyment has made your eyes bright as stars. There is a light and depth in them I have never seen before. It was as if a cloud had rolled away and left revealed the bright Star of Evening, to shine out in deep and intense lustre upon the world. Your lips are like the scarlet—your cheeks wear the blush of the June rose. On one side, that tree forms a splendid back ground for your face. Its rough bark and dark color are sufficient contrast to the smooth fairness of your cheek; then there is a witching wildness in your hair, one side of which has fallen over your neck and shoulder, lying like spiral threads of light over you, for a stray gleam of sunlight is playing fantastically over them. You have no idea what a fine picture you would make. Were it painted, people would say it was too beautiful to be natural. They would call it a fancy sketch.”

“ As if Nature were not more beautiful than Art!” exclaimed Ora, with deepening color. “ In my opinion, Mr. Raymond, no artist ever reached the perfection of his art so nearly, as when he copies Nature most closely.”

"Then you, at least, would acknowledge the justice of my verbal sketch?" he laughed jestingly.

"Nonsense!"

She laughed also, but the color mounted more vividly. "You are laughing at me now, Mr. Raymond."

"Indeed I am not," he replied quickly, dropping his light tone and becoming more earnest. "I should not take such a liberty, I assure you."

Ora pulled up little tufts of moss and idly tossed them into the stream whose bright rippling waves whirled them away swiftly. Already she was beginning to feel less joyous under the gaze he bent upon her. The same expression she had seen upon it once before as they stood upon the steps in the city, was upon it now, and the same feelings of disturbance—a vague, undefined dread—began to steal over her. She wished Ellen had been with her, or that she was back at the house. Perhaps Theodore divined the cause of the shade of gravity that had come over her features, and sought to dispel it, for he sprang up and began to break off branches of evergreen and pluck wild flowers, ostensibly to carry back to his sister.

"Give them to me as you gather them, and I will twine them into a wreath," she said, glad to be free from his earnest gaze.

He did as requested, and while he roamed about in search of the brightest flowers to be found, she wrought them skillfully into a wreath, pausing now and then to look about her and enjoy the scene. A sense of deep happiness grew up in her heart. The twitter of the birds, the faint rustle of the breeze in the leaves,

the purl and splash of the brook, the mossy stones, the scrubby undergrowth—all carried her back to a time when suffering had as yet laid no hand upon her fair young life. She was too busy with her own pleasant thoughts to heed her companion, who, a little distance from her, had suddenly paused to listen. In a moment a gentleman's head appeared just above the brow of a little hill above him. He came forward, parting the bushes carefully, a lady following, her lips wreathed in smiles. Theodore's face assumed an expression of astonishment, and he whistled under his breath—

“Luck! by all that's funny!” he muttered. “Now for it. Let's see what is coming.”

He turned and walked a few paces toward Ora, pausing behind a pile of stones that served to screen him partially from view. He wished only to see her face when the lady came up, that he might set all doubts at rest. Did she know her? He must see.

The lady and gentleman were coming on steadily, laughing and talking easily as they advanced. The sounds caught Ora's ears, and she hastily turned to observe who was near. She did not appear embarrassed, but settled herself back in her place calmly, and drooped her head slightly over her work. She evidently meant to let them pass without further notice.

That, however, soon became impossible. The gentleman stopped and she heard him say something in a low tone to his companion. Involuntarily she raised her eyes, and as she did so, the stranger turned her head. Their eyes met. A rapid glance showed both

faces pallid as marble. Theodore never forgot the agony and intensity of Ora's blue orbs, or the terrified stare of the black ones she encountered. The recognition had been mutual, and evidently painful to both.

The young man's heart throbbed heavily. In a moment a sense of utter shame for the feelings that had prompted him, and wretchedness he could not understand, had taken possession of him. He at once turned his back upon them and began breaking off some laurel branches to cover his late occupation as spy upon the lady whom he had taken under his care and protection.

The strangers passed on, and were soon lost to sight. No word had escaped either. Only for that one glance, he might have been just as much in the dark as before. That had spoken volumes. His surmises were more than verified. But what they had been to each other, and the mystery between them, he was yet to learn.

Ora lifted one quick, searching glance to his face as he came back to her. Had he seen the glance? His face said nothing, and her eyes fell to the ground. She was deadly pale, and her hands shook violently.

"I am afraid these people have startled you with their sudden appearance," he remarked. "You are nervous."

"You saw them?" she said, striving to appear calm.

"Yes, I was only a little way off. That was the Richmond Belle everybody is raving about—and the lady who rides so splendidly. I shall seek an introduction some time soon. She is beautiful."

He could not forbear this last remark, and her quick

gesture of alarm or pain, answered to his expectation. But she forbore comments. With a look of unutterable wretchedness, she arose and said wearily:

"I am tired. Let us go back."

They retraced their steps slowly. She knew by his silence, that he had penetrated her secret. Had he not divined the recognition, he would have bantered her upon her nervousness. But his ready acquiescence to her wishes, and grave demeanor, proved that his suspicions were aroused, and he was pondering the matter silently.

They did not join the picnic party. Finding Ellen awake and willing to return, they accordingly mounted and rode back home leisurely.

Ellen was full of life and spirit, and rattled on of everything she had seen and enjoyed. Theodore roused himself to meet her advances, and they chatted gaily. Ora's silence excited no attention from the young girl. She was always quiet; and so they arrived at their hotel at length, without her ever having uttered a word since they started.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ELLEN and her companion had scarcely reached their rooms, ere Theodore came running into the parlor.

"Father and mother have come," he said breathlessly. "They came about an hour ago, and have not left the room since. They sent for me, but Mr. P—told them I was out somewhere. I hope they did not see us as we rode up the street."

"Oh, my heart will break!" Ellen sank upon a chair, pale and panting, clasping both hands over her bosom. "I wish I had not come here! What shall I do?"

"Only keep your room and do not venture out of it till they leave. Courage, little sister. All will go well yet."

"Ah, but it seems so hard! Hiding like a criminal from my parents' sight—hateful to their eyes as though the blackest of sin tainted me. Oh, mother, dear mother! I cannot bear it!"

"See here, Ellen, this will not do," began Theodore, gravely, seating himself beside her and drawing her close to his bosom. "Trust to your brother, whose love for, and desire to protect you, is the sole aim and virtue of his life. I know it is hard, but you *can* bear it, Ellen—can and must. You must never attempt to see them. If by accident they should get

(299)

sight of you, the hopes I have so long cherished for both are at an end forever. We know too well the stern, unrelenting will of our father. We must not brave it, or all is lost. Try to calm yourself, and be patient, I beg."

She looked up tearfully.

"I will try for your sake, dear Theodore, but if you find me weak and childish forgive me. Every hour my heart yearns more and more for my mother, and to think of her being near me—beneath the same roof, and I forced to shut myself from her sight—never hear the sound of her voice or feel even for a moment the clasp of her arms around me, breaks down all the firmness I have. Oh, if I could but once have her gentle hand on my head, and hear her say as she used to do, 'God bless my daughter,' I think I could bear anything then. And yet, within but a few yards of her, this may not be. Oh! brother! brother!"

This burst of feeling soon spent itself, and she grew more reconciled under the influence of Mr. Raymond's hopeful, hearty words of comfort. As soon as he saw her quiet, he withdrew to seek his parents and welcome them.

He found his father lying upon the bed, pale and feeble, while his mother, seated by him, bathed his head with a reviving spirit. The journey had been very fatiguing, and he was worn out.

Mrs. Raymond rose at once, and threw her arms about her son's neck affectionately. Mr. Raymond merely held out his hand quietly.

"I am so sorry not to have been in the house when

you came," said Theodore. "I hardly expected you before to-morrow or the day after. How did you bear traveling, sir?"

"Badly. I am used up entirely. All the strength I had is gone."

"You need rest, sir. In a little while you will feel better. Are you tired, mother?"

"No, my son; only anxious. Your father has such bad nights—so little sleep, that his strength is failing him in consequence. I do hope the air here will revive him. It seems pleasant."

"It is so," responded Theodore. "Have you made up your mind how long you shall stay, father?"

"No. I have not thought much about it. I suppose we will remain a week or two till I get some strength. I cannot travel so. I had no idea how weak I was until within the last three days."

Theodore sat engaged in conversation for some time, and then rising, said he would order tea in their room. He remained to partake of the meal with them, and afterwards insisted upon sitting awhile with his father until his mother could get some rest.

Mr. Raymond looked gratified, and Mrs. Raymond's eyes filled as she gently patted him on the head.

"Kind, good boy. What should we do without our dear, thoughtful son?"

Perhaps a thought of her other child, so near her without her knowledge, came up with the caress. Anyway, her pale, gentle face grew sadder, and the tears in her eyes dropped silently over her cheeks as she turned away.

Theodore's room adjoined that of his parents, and

he made his mother go into it and lie down while he made his father comfortable for the night.

“One would think you are used to nursing from your manner,” said Mr. Raymond, noting his readiness in everything, and apparent knowledge of all that was to be done.

“And so I am,” thought Theodore but he said nothing.

It was late in the evening before the old gentleman fell asleep, and he had a chance to slip away to his sister. She overwhelmed him with questions. How were they? How did they look? Had they suspected anything? What had they said? To all of which questions he gave distinct and literal answers, patiently and kindly. He saw that she was excited and unhappy, and he pitied her from his heart.

After a little while he rose again.

“Don’t feel badly if I cannot come to you quite so much as I would wish. I will find chances to run in and tell you everything that happens, and you must try in the meantime to be as cheerful as possible. Mother will need me a great deal, you know.”

“How I wish *I* might help her,” murmured Ellen. “Who will say that disobedience does not bring its own consequences? God forgive and pity me. I am the most miserable and wretched of children.”

“There! Do not reproach yourself uselessly. Good night, darling. You must go to sleep and be bright in the morning. I shall be in to see you the first thing I do after waking.”

He kissed her tenderly and went out. Ellen

listened until his footsteps died away, and then going into her chamber, sobbed herself to sleep.

To Ora the boon would not come. Many hours after the busy hum of life was hushed around her, she sat by her window in the pale moonlight and thought. Shadows once more were thickening around her pathway. Turn where she would, the clouds rolled darkly over her way. She scarce was made to feel the warmth and brightness of the sunshine, ere it was obscured, leaving her chilled and more dreary to grope her way through the gloom.

“Ah! when, and in what will it all end? Better for me that I were dead.”

Many a time the despairing cry had risen before. Bitterly it rose now. She was so weary of struggling. Concealment and mystery were so sickening. Truth and frankness would bring upon her the shame and pity of a wronged and neglected wife—from some, scorn and doubt. Between the two stinging alternatives, how could she choose? It was a hard question. How could any woman answer it, and feel at ease in the decision she made? Both were painful. She could not tell which was less painful of the two.

Thus she sat long and silently, pondering. She was not the only one, however, who could not sleep. Across the little yard in the wing of the building, she could see a dim light, and at regular intervals a slight form pass and repass the window with a monotonous tread. She wondered sometimes who it was, and what kept the watcher up so late at night in that uneasy walk. Did she too suffer? Was she unhappily pondering over some dark spots in her life? Ah,

if so, God pity and comfort her, even as she would crave His pity in her own dark hours.

Ah! Ora Meredith, how little you know for whom your prayers ascend! Could you but look into that room and note the whiteness of that dark little face—the fierce clench of the small hands, and the angry, yet deeply suffering light of the black eyes, I fear your pity would change to a different feeling. But God is wise. You see none of this. He drops a veil between the thoughts of His children, that they may not read the warring anger of each other's hearts; and so the flashing eyes and clenched hands are shut out from your sight. You hear neither the broken exclamations or angry breathings. When she pauses, you do not know that her rapid fingers are tracing lines all-important in the thread of your own destiny, and that may soon change the whole aspect of your life.

And yet, who knows but the God to whom that unconscious prayer was breathed, in answer to it, prompted those lines which to-morrow's mail will bear away, like a white-winged messenger to the sunny South!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE short space of a few days brought marked changes to our little party. The elder Mr. Raymond grew seriously ill, and the physician called in shook his head ominously when questioned as to his condition. Being a strictly conscientious man, he would not hold out hopes that might not be realized. He could only say :

“ It is serious, and will require the best of nursing and skill to save him.”

More than this he avoided uttering. Theodore watched faithfully in the sick room, relieving his mother all in his power ; while Ellen, pale and crushed, sat in her room with folded hands, resisting any effort of her nurse to rouse and cheer her. It was well, perhaps, for Ora, that this state of Ellen's should follow the painful discovery she had made, since it served to make her in a manner forget herself, and devote all her energies to other purposes than idle broodings and vain conjectures.

And yet a fearful change was wrought in a few days. Her usually pale face had grown of a marble whiteness, while the features so lately becoming round and full, had again assumed their sharp outlines, speaking silently of suffering and care. Her eyes were darker, once more lighted deeply with the old spark of trouble that had slumbered in their depths,

and beneath them, black circles were slowly creeping. Had not the friends around her been so fully occupied with their own cares, they must have been alarmed at the wondrous transformation of those few days.

One evening Theodore came in looking pale and weary. To Ellen's question he returned the usual reply, "No better," and shortly after, took an opportunity to say to Ora in a low tone:

"I shall not come again to-night. Mother is worn out, and I shall stay by her. The end, I think, is near. Try to keep Ellen as quiet as you can, and do not let her know that there is such immediate danger. Her excitement, I fear, would make her either ill, or forgetful of prudence. Persuade her to retire early."

"You will send me word if anything happens?"

"Yes, good night."

He took her hand in his, and a slight pressure showed his appreciation of her faithfulness and sympathy. For a moment his eyes rested on her face, and a deep sigh escaped him. He noted the change for the first time, and her uncomplaining gentleness touched his heart. He said nothing, however, and went out slowly, after a few words to his sister.

That night, near one o'clock, a light tap on Ora's door roused her.

"Are you awake?" asked a low voice outside.

"Yes. Do you want anything?"

"Get up and dress yourself, quickly. I want you."

In less than three minutes, she came out and stood beside him.

"My father is dying, I fear," said Theodore, in

low, faltering tones. "But do not say anything. Come with me to his apartment. Mother is having fainting fits, and I can do nothing alone. I need your help sadly."

She did not hesitate, but suffered him to take her hand and lead her out. They passed rapidly through the dimly lighted hall to a stairway which they ascended. When they reached the door above, he opened a door on the right, and entered a large room where a painful picture was revealed.

Ora had never forgotten the stern features of the old minister. The inflexible lines of his hard face were as stern now as when he turned her helpless from his door. He was thinner and paler, but the same personage was there, strongly marked and inflexible, lying with half-closed eyes and hand, crossed over his breast, shaken with agony, and moaning piteously.

Mrs. Raymond, pale and weak, lay upon the sofa, weeping silently, and kindly attended by a chambermaid whom Theodore had called in from the night watch, while he went for Ora. The doctor sat near the patient, noting every change carefully. He scarcely lifted his eyes as they entered, but appeared wholly absorbed in the sufferer.

A fresh burst of tears greeted Theodore's return. The poor woman's long suffering heart was sorely tried in this hour.

"Oh, if he would only remember poor Ellen kindly at last," she whispered, "I feel as if I could bear it better. But to see him die as he has lived—silent and unforgiving!"

Theodore turned his head aside quickly, striving to

swallow back the feeling that rose rebelliously in his throat and choked his utterance.

"Ah! where is she now?—my poor wanderer!" she murmured again, all her thoughts centering upon her child. "I feel as if I shall go wild to think of her far away, and in ignorance of the change so fast approaching. Oh, I am sure if she knew this, she would hasten to her mother. She was always loving and kind-hearted—poor, misguided girl."

"Yes, mother, and it is not her fault she is not here now," spoke the brother earnestly. "Had not her name been a forbidden word in her father's household, she would long since have come back to us, and we all should have been happier."

The mother made no reply, but turned her face to the sofa pillows and lay still.

Ora sat down by her, gently chafing her hands, while Theodore crossed the room to his father's side. A fearful paroxysm of pain was coming on, and his groans and cries were becoming each moment more terrible.

As the cries increased, Mrs. Raymond's distress became insupportable. She shuddered feebly, and at last with a low, wailing cry, yielded to the deadly faintness that crept over her. She scarcely came out of one fainting fit ere she sank into another, and Ora had her hands full to attend to her.

Between the two the devoted son divided his attention. It was a fearful hour for him. Sometimes Ora would lift her glance to his face to see how he bore it, but found him always calm and steady, though she could see plainly that he suffered. His father's life

seemed fast ebbing away, and the one great hope he had cherished, was dying out with the sands of his life; and as his hopes faded, a settled sadness and quiet gloom fixed itself upon his features. Poor Ellen must go on through life, broken-hearted with the memory of her father's unrelenting anger.

Thus hours passed, bringing no relief or change. Mrs. Raymond grew worse, if anything, and now the doctor divided his time between the husband and wife. The long-continued faints were becoming critical and alarming. Ora thought that the morning's sun would rise upon two hearts at rest, for she could not hope that the poor woman would survive her husband, even though that husband had been cruel and unrelenting.

Once when Theodore bent over his mother, Ora seized the opportunity to whisper a request in his ear. Her heart was full. She could no longer bear to think of the girl's painful, isolated position. All night she had been thinking of her.

"Go for her, Mr. Raymond. Do bring her here," she pleaded. "It is cruel to keep her away now, when Death overshadows both. How can you bear the thought?"

Theodore began to tremble.

"Can she bear it, do you think?"

"Better than to be left there alone in this hour. Oh, what does it matter to them now? They will not be affected by her presence, and it will comfort her a little."

Theodore crossed to the doctor and whispered with him a moment, and then went out hurriedly. Ora's

heart beat fast. She felt sure he had gone for Ellen, and now that he had gone, she began to fear the effect upon her of this painful scene. How would she bear it? Perhaps her strength would give way too, and leave her helpless. Perhaps she would cry out in her distress and alarm the house. Every possible suggestion that could disturb and render her uneasy, rose in her mind.

Ten minutes, an interminable age it seemed, elapsed before they came. With an irrepressible impulse, Ora abandoned her post and hastened to meet them before they could advance into the room, and threw her arms around Ellen.

"Oh, dear Ellen, do be calm now, for Heaven's sake," she murmured, in her fear, as she pressed the shaking form to her bosom. "Think of the awful danger to yourself and them, and be calm!"

"Do not fear," replied the poor girl, faintly. "I will be as calm as any one here. Theodore would not let me come till I had promised him, and I shall not break it, even though my heart break in the attempt to crush it into silence."

She verified her assertion by first going to her mother, and gently, tenderly kissing her pale lips and brow; lovingly stroking back the hair from her face and bestowing every mark of overweening affection upon her. Tears rained silently over her face, but for one moment she did not forget herself or utter a cry.

After a little while she went to her father and gazed earnestly upon his features, thinned and sharpened more than ever, by this night's suffering. She took

his hand in hers, and all the better feelings of her heart rising with that touch, she fell upon her knees by the bed, uttering one little sob, breathing one touching prayer.

“Oh, father, do not die till you have forgiven your child!”

The appeal went to every heart. The doctor turned his face aside to brush away his tears unseen. Ora bowed her head and wept freely, while Theodore, staunch and true in his loyal love, knelt by his sister, and drew her within his arms.

No more touching picture was ever seen.

A little later, the sick man stirred and unclosed his eyes. After the paroxysm of which we have spoken, he had fallen into a stupor, during which he lay as one dead. But now a faint spark of intelligence shone in his eyes as they wandered round. The Doctor stepped to his side, touching Theodore, who rose and stood by him. The old man's eyes rested fixedly upon him, with a growing sense of yearning and inquiry. Now, Ellen unable longer to endure the suspense, slowly raised herself, and his eyes wandered to her face. For one moment brother and sister held their breath in an agony of suspense and fear. But no cloud knit itself in the old man's brow. After a moment's steady gaze, he smiled a faint, tender smile, and half lifted one feeble hand.

With a beating heart, the poor girl bent to his lips and felt his kiss upon her cheek. Then she knew that she was forgiven, even had not the slight, clinging clasp of the feeble hands folded over hers, told her so before.

"At last, thank God!" was the grateful cry of the noble-hearted brother, and hastily turning away, he sat down in a distant corner of the room, and sobbed like a child in his joy, while Ellen wept upon her father's breast.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE morning sun shone in calmly upon a quiet and gladdened group. Mr. Raymond lay peacefully sleeping, his son seated by him, while Ellen, her young face lighted with grateful joy, sat on a low stool near her mother's sofa, both hands fondly clasped in hers, while the gentle eyes fixed on her features spoke volumes of love and gratitude. The doctor pronounced the crisis past, and said Mr. Raymond would get well rapidly, turning a beaming glance on Ellen as he did so. Mrs. Raymond had a panacea for all her ills in the happy assurance of her husband's safety, and the blessed reality of her daughter's presence. The clouds but lately so threatening, were rolling away, and light and peace had come back to their darkened lives.

Ora looked on in quiet sympathy, and rejoiced in the change. It was a rare and sweet feeling to enjoy such happiness as she felt in looking upon the happiness of these two devoted children, restored to a parents love and confidence, no longer compelled to resort to deceit to gain justice.

"It looked fearful for them a little while since,"



"Oh, father, do not die till you have forgiven your child!" (Page 311.)

she thought. "Now all is well. A few hours have changed, as it were, the whole aspect of their lives, and it is very bright for them. May not I, too, hope for a change? Surely, I am not doomed to live all my earthly life in dread and sadness. Oh, I must hope for a brighter day."

The doctor was right. Mr. Raymond recovered rapidly. In the course of a week he sat up; in a few days more he rode out in an open carriage, and in a fortnight, was able to walk about aided by his staff, his son always beside him.

Theodore watched over his feeble footsteps as he might a little tottering child's. There was a new charm for him in the old man's society. His harshness and sternness he had cast off with the dangers of his malady, and had risen to his new life, gentle, thoughtful and kind.

"During his convalescence, they had made full and mutual confessions. Theodore acknowledged his system of deception and its motive, while the old man's tears fell silently over the remembrance of his cruelty. And now the young man lifted his head in conscious pride, and his step grew more buoyant and springing under the happy influences around him. He could be his own noble, honest self without fear. He saw his sister forgiven, and received lovingly home again in her parents' hearts, and his work of self-sacrifice was done. He could love and revere his father, and for this he rejoiced with a joy none might guess, except those who, like him, have been driven from the tender emotions of filial love by harshness and injustice. Now he wisely ignored all

that was past, and lived in the present, calmed and satisfied.

As Mr. Raymond's health improved, they mingled more in the society of the Springs. Theodore loved to entice his mother and sister into company; and as several of the lady's old friends were there, it was not long ere she had a pleasant little circle around her.

Some of these were fully acquainted with Ellen's history—the story of her marriage, being discarded, and her final return and reconciliation. It was generally believed that her husband was dead. But though this had afforded a nice piece of gossip about the time of the meeting between the child and parents, they were sufficiently delicate never to hint a knowledge of the painful events, and things passed on pleasantly enough.

But now came the most painful season for Ora. In spite of her efforts to keep aloof, she often found herself drawn into the society she wished to avoid. Ellen's warm heart, glowing in its restored happiness, clung more closely to her, and the mother loved her for her child's sake—respected her for her own innate dignity and refinement. She had made a favorable impression upon all, and was beloved and honored.

But the footing on which she stood was uncertain. The interest they betrayed in her gave rise to the question:

“Who is she?”

A lady put the question to Mrs. Raymond, and Ellen had answered it quickly:

“A lady—a widow whom brother engaged to take care of me when so very ill this Spring. She has

lost her husband and a child, and has no relations to whom she may look for assistance. She told me she was an orphan. That she is a lady, however, and has been accustomed to luxury, every one may see."

"Where does she come from!"

"The South. Can you not tell her southern nativity by her accent?"

"Yes. I thought so. She is a very interesting person."

"Indeed, she is! I wish you could hear her talk sometimes. I never heard her equal in conversation; and her voice and expression in singing, are matchless. You would love the ground she walked on, if you heard her sing."

"How extravagant you are, Ellen," smiled Mrs. Raymond, glancing at the lady to whom the eulogium was addressed.

"Oh no, mamma, you are mistaken. No words are competent to express her wondrous power. You shall judge for yourself sometime. I will get her to sing for you. She used to lull me to sleep every night, and invariably I closed my eyes with the tears hanging upon my lashes."

"You rouse my curiosity," said another lady of the group. "Can you gratify us also, and persuade your friend to sing for our benefit?"

"Perhaps, but she is very shy, and hates company dreadfully."

"I believe all ladies do who have met reverses, and are compelled to accept dependent positions where they once took the lead in society. How I pity

that class of refined poor people who drop from ease and luxury into labor and self-dependence."

"Truly, their's cannot be the happiest of lives," asserted Mrs. Raymond.

"I do not think our friend is an exception. She does not look either happy or contented. Only enduring and patient. She never complains, yet she seldom laughs, and very often sighs heavily when she thinks no one observes her. I find my sympathies very strongly enlisted in her behalf, sometimes."

"Then she is so good and gentle. I know I've been very naughty and cross many a time," put in Ellen, "but she was always the same patient, loving nurse, in spite of it. I wish I could ever hope to be half as good!"

Thus interest was aroused by exciting curiosity and implanting a favorable impression of her in the minds of these gossip-loving ladies, ever ready for new and pleasing sensations. From the general impression, old ladies found an outlet for sympathy, while the young dipped into the romance of her history as they gained an idea of it. Much to Ora's pain and annoyance, she soon found herself an object of special attention, sought after by all, some curiously, some with real kindly interest, but in both senses, far from pleasant or agreeable.

The one great dread of her life now, was of meeting the lady of the forest encounter. No sight of her had betrayed her presence since she had been out of the sick chambers of her friends. Still she feared, among so many, it was a mere chance she had not

seen her, and that the encounter might yet take place at some awkward moment.

One evening Ellen and her mother, aided by some friends, joined in persuading her to play for them. She would rather have done anything in the world, conscious as she was how all eyes would be drawn upon her. Yet she had no motive for refusing, and went to the piano with a sick heart.

There was a necessity for exertion. She made it, and sang a favorite Operatic Aria through well. Everybody looked pleased, and the drawing-room began to fill. The ladies begged for other songs, and while she turned the leaves of a music book, searching for something, Mrs. Norton, one of Mrs. Raymond's friends, bent over her with a compliment.

"Your voice is perfect, and now that we know it, you may expect to find yourself in demand. We poor pleasure seekers, look upon those possessed of your powers, as a godsend. Do you know, we have not had a single vocalist here since the little Richmond belle went away. We who are obliged to remain the season out, find it dull. For my part, I am half-starved for some good music. Be generous and benevolent, Mrs. Meredith, and you will find us a grateful people."

Her response was one of genial lightness. The little lady's chatter had carried a dread from her heart that before had weighed it down heavily. But now that she was sure of her absence, she could dare to bask in the favor with which people seemed disposed to receive her, and fear no humiliating results.

She sang piece after piece with spirit and power,

until at length, seeing that she began to weary, the charmed circle broke, around her, and she was mercifully released. Ellen caught her arm as she took a seat beside her, and pinched it slyly.

"You little witch," she whispered hurriedly. "There's not a girl can stand a chance after this. All their noses will be out of joint! Only think, three gentlemen have begged to be presented to you already. Oh, well may it be said, 'Beware of the vidders.'"

"Hush, Ellen! What nonsense!" returned Ora in the same low tone, looking round to see that no one had heard the mischievous whisper. "Who is that coming this way?"

"One of your conquests," said Ellen, again, in a minor key. "He comes for presentation."

She was right. The gentleman came up and addressed the young lady with a significant glance, who, comprehending it at once, presented Ora in due form. Ora conquered her annoyance as best she could, and entered into conversation easily. The gentleman was highly talented, cultivated after the most approved style, and possessed a fund of information on home and foreign subjects sufficient to make him a more than ordinary conversationist. Both soon became earnest and interested, and those about them dropped into silence, one by one, till they soon had the whole of the attention of their immediate circle. Ellen was delighted. Her friend was winning laurels of esteem and admiration from all, while her own love increased from the appreciation of others. The mountain was moving. Mrs. Meredith was coming back to her old footing, only on a

more elevated scale than she had stood in Doctor Clifton's family. Would the time come when she would find herself hurled back in disgrace, to struggle under the bitter tide of wrong and injustice?

CHAPTER XXXII.

OCTOBER came in her crimson and purple glory and still the Raymonds were at Saratoga. The time passed rapidly and pleasantly to all, Ora excepted; and even she was forced to yield to a certain sense of security and peace akin to contentment.

Yet when talk of returning home reached her ears, she was rejoiced more than at anything else. She could never feel wholly at ease until safe from the possibility of meeting her enemy.

Only a few days yet remained of their stay. Theodore proposed that they should make the most of it, and accordingly there were long walks, rides and moonlight strolls, between which times, they sang, played, danced and talked as all people do, bent on killing time and seeking enjoyment.

Ora, in the short season she had been out, had unwittingly gained many admirers. Seldom did she sit down in the parlor or walk out without a crowd of friends or a host of attendants, as Theodore laughingly asserted. He seldom attempted to get near her. He saw her every day, and that she was well cared for. Beyond that he yielded her the merest

civilities required of him, and then seemed to ignore her existence.

Always cheerful, always gay, yet she saw a change. Had he remembered that unfortunate meeting, and did it raise doubts in his mind which kept him aloof? Gradually he had seemed to withdraw from their old habits. There were no more quiet little chats, no seeming wish either to be near or avoid, yet of cool indifference; perfect politeness always observed alone or with others, but no more. Had things been different she would have been glad of this. As it was, she feared his thoughts, his silence, his indifference, his politeness. The latter was too studied. It argued a change.

This continued up to the last day but one of her stay. On the afternoon of that day she was sitting in the parlor of their own suite of rooms, Mrs. Raymond, Ellen and Mr. Raymond having driven out for the last time. She had declined accompanying them, and had taken up a book to read, when Theodore came in and accosted her lightly.

"Alone? I thought you were out riding?"

"No, I preferred home. How is it you did not go?"

"Like you, I preferred home. I am sick of running about, and shall be glad to get away from here. But you are moping yourself to death. Why do you not go down? There are three 'last roses of summer' straying about the premises nursing vain hopes. I think I must get my friend, the proprietor, to tender you a bill of thanks for services done him this season."

"Why?" asked Ora, wonderingly.

Theodore laughed.

"Why, how innocent you are. For drawing custom, of course. I know no less than four gentlemen who would have gone four weeks ago but for your powers of attraction. They could not find it in their hearts to leave while you remained."

"Mr. Raymond!"

He lifted his eyes from the little branch of evergreen he had carried with him into the room, and encountered her glance. A surprised look he met, and dignity mingled with indignation was expressed in every curve of face and form.

"Well," he laughed easily, "is there anything in that, that you look so proudly astonished? Ladies love to know themselves admired. You know yourself attractive, and are but receiving your due."

She let fall her eyes and deigned no reply.

"Is it not so?" he asked in the same tone, plucking away at the leaves in his hand. "Now tell me candidly, Mrs. Meredith, what makes a woman happier than to feel conscious of a beauty and talent that may win whom she likes to her feet?"

"What?" she lifted her face full upon him, her deep eyes glistening with the sudden rise of emotion. "What makes a woman happier than these, do you ask? Strange question to put to one of feeling and principle! But, since you put this question, hear the answer. A woman, if she be a true woman, is happy in knowing herself regarded as something more than a thing of beauty and admiration—something to respect and esteem above caprices and

whims, and the petty ambition of drawing others to her feet. To feel herself looked upon as an equal, a companion; a being whose feelings and sentiments are respected, and whose weaknesses are free from the sports and jests of her associates. You cannot think such an ambition as you describe, when attained, can bring happiness, Mr. Raymond."

"I know scores that are perfectly happy with just such resources as we are discussing. Do you not feel a sense of happiness in your own power?"

"My power of pleasing? Yes. It tends to enable me to make those around me happy. I desire it—in a measure cultivate it. But I desire no powers to win me admiration. It is a duty to try to add to the brightness of the lives of others so far as we may. No duty demands that we seek admiration which could affect only ourselves, and benefit no one."

"I grant you that, but where will you find one woman in a thousand who will stop to think of others, if she be pretty and attractive? She loves all the homage she can get too well, and will only think of others so far as she can use them to further her purposes."

"For one who has a mother and a sister, you take a severe view of the sex," she replied, pointedly, her feelings of chagrin and displeasure bursting out in spite of herself. "I am surprised to find you so uncharitable. It is unlike you."

"No, it is like me. You have not seen me fairly yet. I have seen too much flirting and coquetry since I have been here, not to get the old feeling stirred up, and this is one of the times I must let

some of it escape. It is not good for me. I get sickened. Perhaps I may find one woman in a thousand to whose strict principles of truth and honor I can yield up my homage willingly—no more.”

“Yet there are many—very many good and true.”

“Fewer than you think, especially among the fairest. They use their beauty as merchants use their fairest goods to attract attention. If they get that, they care for little else.”

Ora smiled slightly. A light began to break in upon her.

“Perhaps you have reasons for the assertion,” she said. “They may have been practising upon you, and touched a tender place in your heart.”

She had said it jestingly. He looked her straight in the eyes and said slowly:

“Perhaps. You can judge best.”

“I? I do not understand you! How can I know who may have been playing upon your feelings till it has reached a point where you as good as declare yourself disgusted with the sex?”

“Oh, you are a competent judge of human nature. I give you credit for discretion and good sense.”

“Thank you. You have changed your mind since you asked me what more woman wished, to constitute happiness, than the beauty and talent to win admirers.”

He got up and crossed the room to a window, and stood looking out for a moment. When he came back, he sat down near her. His whole face

and manner were changed. He was agitated and eager.

"We have talked nonsense long enough," he said. "Excuse me for forcing it upon you. I did but jest. I came here for another purpose. Mrs. Meredith, I want to ask you a question. Will you answer me?"

"I will if I can rightly. What is it?"

"Who is the lady you saw that day we rode out—the same in which mother and father came here?"

The sudden question turned her sick and dizzy. She could scarcely gasp out:

"What reason have you for supposing I know?"

"Enough. Your face and hers were sufficient to betray your knowledge of each other. There is knowledge and interest, peculiar and strong. I saw it."

"And supposing it were so, have you a right to question its nature?"

"Yes, I believe I have. I want to know for the sake of my future peace of mind. Once I asked you to tell me something of yourself. You refused. Since that, I have tried to be patient, and leave you to tell me of your own free will. That incident served to increase my desire, and now I can bear it no longer. I must know it."

"Sir!"

"Nay, do not be offended. My happiness rests upon it, Mrs. Meredith, or I would not dare to do so. Surely, we have a right to secure this if we can."

"I cannot see where it involves yours in the least," she returned coldly.

"You cannot!" His tones were passionate. "Oh,

can I believe you when you say this? Where are your woman's eyes and wits, that you do not catch the secret of my interest? I love you! I would know if there is any reason why I may not seek to win you. I have not dared till now, to even dream of uttering the truth to myself, lest there should be some barrier between us. But the time has gone by for suspense. Only tell me this—I seek to know no more now. Is there ought existing between you and any man who might seek to win your love? I ask this because your conduct has taught me that you avoided attention from my sex, as though you feared evil. This fear of evil could only arise from some conscious barrier. Is it so, or am I in fault?

“You are right,” she breathed, unable to give any but a plain, frank answer to such a question.

“Is it insurmountable?” His voice was thick and husky.

“It is.”

He groaned as if in deep pain.

“I did not know,” he faltered, “what strong hopes and feelings have sprung up, till now. You have given me a blow!”

She rose to leave the room, shaking like an aspen.

“Do not leave me yet,” he cried in passionate entreaty, seizing her hand to detain her. “Spare me yet a moment in which to speak to you.”

“No, I must not,” she said positively, “you may be tempted to utter words I must not listen to. Let me go, Mr. Raymond, and try to forget this wild scene!”

“Forget it! I cannot, and you know it well. Tell

me, what is it, that shuts me out hopelessly from your thoughts?"

"I cannot. Be assured that you *are* barred from me most effectually. The nature of that bar, I may not tell you. Mr. Raymond, let me go. Do not add to my pain by prolonging this scene. My life has been one of sorrow. I had hoped for peace now. Do not destroy the last to which I cling."

"God knows I would not. That you have suffered, I am fully aware, and it must have been deeply, to have made you what you are. I would I might shield you forever from the possibility of future sorrow."

"Hush! I cannot listen to such words!"

She struggled to get free.

"What is it?" he continued. "Tell me what it is that bars me from you! Do you love another?"

"Mr. Raymond, cease this questioning. I have answered enough. Remember our respective positions—master and servant—no more. I am your paid subordinate, and as far beyond your reach as the North Star. Do not pursue this painful subject farther. It must end!"

She wrenched her hand from his grasp and swept from the room to shut herself up in an agony of grief and alarm, while he turned away, his manly heart full of a wild, bitter and rebellious feeling new to him. Leaving the place, he wandered away, across the fields to a little belt of woods, where he threw himself upon the grass sprinkled with the bright autumn leaves, and lay brooding bitterly till darkness sheltered all Nature with one sable robe.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was after nine o'clock when Theodore returned to the hotel. Ellen and Mrs. Raymond were in their parlor. Ora was not to be seen. He supposed she was in her room, and took a seat silently. Too much occupied with his own thoughts, he had paid no attention to what they were saying when he came in—did not heed them now till Mrs. Raymond called to him across the room.

"Come here my son, I want you."

He rose slowly and approached her.

"Well, mother, what is it?"

Mrs. Raymond looked up at him quickly.

"What is the matter with you, my boy? Are you not well? You are quite pale and look worn," she cried in concern.

"There is nothing the matter with me. I am quite well, I assure you. A little dull, perhaps, but no more," he replied, anxious to allay her fears and put an end to unpleasant questions. "Did you wish to tell me something particular?"

"Yes, but I fancied as you came up, that you had heard it already, you look so gloomy and disturbed. Have you heard nothing unpleasant?"

"Anything unpleasant, in what way? Do you speak of anything concerning myself or all of us—or is it anything about us at all?" he asked in per-

plexity, his thoughts running upon his interview with Mrs. Meredith.

"About Ellen," answered Mrs. Raymond, compressing her lips while Ellen dropped her face in her hands. Instantly his brow flushed. He saw that something was wrong to affect them in such a striking manner.

"What is it, and who has been speaking of her?" he demanded sternly.

"Do not allow yourself to get excited," returned Mrs. Raymond. "It is a woman and you can do nothing. A stranger to us all. That is the most singular thing about the affair. How could she learn so much of our history? I never saw the woman before to-night in my life, and yet she seems to possess a thorough knowledge of everything that concerns us—even our most private affairs."

"How did you learn this? Who is the stranger?" demanded Theodore.

"I don't know who she is, I am sure. She seems to have been here before, from what I could gather from a conversation I overheard between her and a gentleman in the parlor. She is tall, very slender, with dark eyes and hair. Very pretty and very stylish in her appearance. Ellen says she thinks she saw her here before we came, on horseback, but is not quite sure. I am inclined to think so. She must have been here before, and some busybody informed her all she repeated so volubly. It is a shame! I cannot get over it. Who of our acquaintances here is it that has made such free use of our names to strangers?"

"What is it that was said?" asked Theodore impatiently. "I am all in the dark as yet. Explain yourself mother."

"Softly! give me time, my son. It happened this way:

"When we returned from our drive, after changing our dress, we went into the parlor, and Ellen sat down by Mrs. Tyler, while I, feeling a little tired, went into a window near by, but just back of them, and drawing the curtains, sat still, looking out.

"I had been there perhaps ten minutes, when a lady and gentleman came in and sat down near me, and their conversation turned at once upon Ellen. I could not help hearing every word, though they spoke in a low tone.

"Do you know that young lady?" asked the gentleman, indicating your sister by a slight nod. She laughed and answered lightly.

"Yes, it is a Miss Raymond. At least she is called so, though she is married. I believe her husband proved a villain, and deserted her. A fit punishment for disobedience, I suppose we may say. It was a runaway match. The father, who is a minister, opposed it bitterly, and discarded her in consequence. It is but lately that they were reconciled. I assure you, it is quite an interesting little romance."

"Indeed! She is pretty," remarked the gentleman with a tone of interest.

"Yes, she is quite handsome. But her companion is handsomer. Do you see that tall lady just beyond her, with a book in her hand. That is her companion. I believe she nursed her through a dangerous illness.

I have heard the whole history. After the husband deserted her, the brother brought her home secretly and took care of her. It was then this lady was engaged. They came here, and a little while afterward, the parents came. The presence of their daughter was unknown to them till a dangerous illness of the father's brought it to light. They thought him dying and she was brought to him. The consequence was a reconciliation, and a return of the young lady to her former position. For my part,' the lady here said confidentially, 'I cannot understand how she can bear to come before the world again after such unpleasant circumstances. A discarded daughter—deserted wife! She must have a good stout heart as the Dutchman says, to endure it. She has, since the revelation, furnished food for gossip for everybody here. They *must* know how people regard the affair. How can they come into society in the manner they have done? One would think they would seclude themselves rigidly.'"

"Here," continued Mrs. Raymond, "she condescended to stop, and I left the window. I went straight to Ellen, excused her to Mrs. Tyler, and brought her out. I could not bear the thought of her sitting under the scathing criticism of this daring stranger. Oh, it has hurt me more than I can tell! How foolish we have been to stay here!"

"Aye!" cried Theodore, pausing in a rapid pace across the room. "The fault is ours! We have been fools to run this risk of scandal. We are not ignorant of the world's habit of handling people's

names, and should have shielded ourselves by going home and staying there."

"But, brother, you forget papa's health," put in Ellen. "It was necessary to remain on his account."

"Then we ought to have shunned society."

"I agree with you," answered Mrs. Raymond, "but we scarcely thought any friends we had here would handle our names so freely. Old, valued acquaintances, who ought to look over the follies of youth, and be silent concerning them."

"Who ever heard of people doing that?" aspirated Theodore, angrily. "I can tell you, mother, there's no one to be trusted with affairs that touch us in a tender point. The safest way is to keep aloof from everybody, and guard one's own interests silently. I am exasperated to think of this affair, though it is nothing wonderful, when we remember the cause; on the contrary, it is quite natural."

He turned abruptly and left the room, his thoughts in tumult. That his sister was the subject of gossip for strangers, was enough to upset his usual equanimity, even had he no other cause. But this, combined with his personal disquiet, made him savage.

"Who can this woman be that is meddling herself thus in our affairs," he commented inly. "I'll find out, if possible. She is most too ready with her information. Where could she have got such minute particulars? I wonder—"

His cogitations were cut short by an apparition that stopped him short in his way down the hall. A door on the right was hastily opened, and Mrs.

Meredith, came out, both hands clasped over her bosom. Her face was pallid, her eyes wild. A slender figure was behind her in the door way, and sent a mocking laugh after the retreating form of her visitor, for visitor she doubtless was, since she had emerged from her room. Theodore recognized the Richmond belle in his brief glimpse of her, and a thought flashed through his brain.

“Could Mrs. Meredith have informed her of their history in such detail? She knew it, and that there was a mystery between them, he knew already. He had no doubt of the person whose insulting gossip his mother had overheard. She was at the Springs when they came there, and had remained sometime. The incident of Ora’s fright on first seeing her—her subsequent meeting in the wood—everything came back vividly. He had never forgotten them, but had given up his endeavor to unravel the mystery for the time being. Now all the old interest was awakened. He was angry and determined to get at the bottom of it.

On seeing him, the stranger closed her door, and he confronted Ora haughtily.

“Mrs. Meredith, a word with you, if you please, ere you join my mother,” he said commandingly.

She drew back surprised, and haughty as himself, though trembling in every limb.

“You must excuse me. I cannot speak with you here. It is not a time or a fitting place, even were I inclined to grant the request.”

“I do not wish the interview here. Come with me out a little way. I must speak with you.”

"Impossible! Suffer me to pass, Mr. Raymond. I have no time to spare."

"I will not. You must hear what I have to say," he returned, drawing her arm within his own, and turning to descend the stairs. "I will not detain you long."

"This is an outrage, sir!" broke from Ora as he drew her along, almost forcibly. "I have a great mind to call for assistance."

"Be still," he said in a low, determined tone. "Don't attract useless attention. I am not going to murder you."

She was panting with passionate rebellious feeling, but he was heedless of the fact, and conducted her out of the house, entering a secluded walk and proceeding some distance to escape observation. Ora here broke loose from his grasp and stood before him.

"Tell me the meaning of this, sir! You have taken a most unwarrantable liberty in thus forcing an interview upon me. I thought the matter at an end."

"Do not mistake me!" he replied coolly. "I am not going to repeat my declaration of love to you, be assured. I am now endeavoring to fathom this mystery between yourself and that woman I saw with you a moment since. You refused to tell me once to-day, but now I repeat the request. What is she to you, and why should you repeat to her the sad history of my sister's unfortunate marriage? I am puzzled to understand how it could benefit you to recount it to an utter stranger."

"I repeat anything concerning your sister to her? you are mistaken, Mr. Raymond. Such a thought never entered my mind. What authority have you in making the accusation?"

"Her thorough knowledge of the affair, and your secret intercourse with her. I can come to no other conclusion. How came you to tell her of our affairs. Who is she, that she cares to know and repeat them?"

"Sir, you insult me with the question! Have I not told you I did not repeat anything to her? As for secret intercourse, I deny that also; I never spoke to her till this night, and then she forced the interview upon me by drawing me into her room. Your names were not mentioned once. Mr. Raymond, you are acting a cruelly unkind part by me," she continued in a calmer tone. "I am in an agony of dread and suspense. I must return at once to the house. Do not misconstrue me further. I am the last one to injure one of your family, or to betray a confidence reposed in me, as you would believe."

"But what am I to think of all this? You will make no explanation. Why do you refuse to tell me who this woman is? It were better for you to explain than to lay yourself open to condemnation and suspicion."

"Oh, Mr. Raymond, *why* will you persecute me?" she cried suddenly, wringing her hands. "I shall go crazy! That woman has been the bane of my life—poisoned my whole existence—brought me to the friendless, helpless condition you see me in now. Do not ask me how. I cannot tell you. But she is

my bitter enemy, know that—and I hate—oh, I *hate* her as I would hate a fiend incarnate.”

Was this Ora Meredith—this personification of wrath that stood before him—her hands locked—her frame trembling—hissing the words through her shut teeth with the intensity of an overpowering emotion? Theodore could scarcely realize the truth, and she stood beating one foot passionately upon the ground, while his gaze penetrated the gloom to read her face.

“Mr. Raymond,” she added suddenly and eagerly as a new thought seemed to strike her, “you to-day expressed an affection for me which I was forced to put coldly from me. I did not wish to give you pain, and do not now. I cannot help it if I have done so. A cruel Fate pursues me. I am safe and at rest nowhere. As soon as I find a little haven where I fancy I may be in peace, I am driven forth more utterly wretched. Oh, it is hard, hard! Now I must leave you as I have left every one else who was kind to me, and gave me a peaceful home. I beg of you to help me. Get me off by this night’s train. You can help me. I must not wait till to-morrow!”

“But why to night? You must be mad. There is not an hour to get ready in before the cars leave. How could you go, and why should you? We all expect you to return to the city with us,” cried Theodore, in amazement.

“But, I cannot, I *cannot* wait,” she replied vehemently. “Oh, if I stay here, I shall go mad! He is coming to-morrow, will be here before we could leave, and I dare not meet him. Ah, Mr. Raymond,

if you knew how I suffered, you would pity me ! Do not think me rash or mad. I am quite sane, but I shall not be long, if this continues."

He saw that she was wild with excitement, and pitied her. His tones were kind and gentle when he replied :

"But this is an extraordinary proceeding, Mrs. Meredith. How am I to account to my friends for your departure if you go?"

"Oh, I don't know! Anyway you think proper. I must go ! I *must*, I tell you ! I must go now, or I will be too late !"

She was turning from him, but he caught her arm and held her fast.

"Not yet. One word more, Ora. *Why* should you go?"

"Why? Did I not tell you some one was coming whom I did not want to see? I cannot see him. It will kill me."

"Whom do you mean? Tell me Ora. I will be your friend."

He held her tightly, and in an agony of impatience she struggled to get free. But his calm, kind tones arrested her efforts. A change of feeling rushed over her instantly.

"I will tell you," she uttered desperately. "It will put an end to some things I can no longer struggle against. The man who is to be here is my husband. That woman came between him and me nearly six years ago. She has wrecked my life. I could not bear to know myself neglected for *her*. It drove me mad, and I left him. Since then my life

has been one of toil and suffering. Now you understand the mystery between us. You understand why I paled and shook at the sight of her. I could never forget. Her face will live in my memory till death, and the sight of it will madden me yet. To-night she stood in her door as I came by, and suddenly caught my arm before I had noticed her, drawing me within. I will not repeat the scene that followed. She mocked and taunted me, and said he was coming after her to-morrow. My God, *can* I stay to see him by *her* side again—to live over something of the old agony and shame of years past! No, I *will* not. Once I would have cut my tongue out before I would have told you this! How could I bear to tell you such a tale of humiliation, and feel that you pitied me! But now, desperation has driven me beyond my pride. I want only to escape him. You have promised to be my friend. I have told you how much I need one, in the story of my wrongs. Will you be that friend, or will you retract?"

"I will be your friend," he responded, huskily. Trust me, Mrs. Meredith. I thank you for your confidence. Would you had told me long ago, when I first asked you. It would have spared us both much pain, and I should not have insulted you with 'pity.' However, it is all past now. I will help you all I can. Where do you wish to go? Back to the city?"

"Yes. But I can never come to you again. I shall find something to do, someway. All I want is to keep out of his sight, for I could not bear it. He must not know where to look for me."

"Will you answer me one question more, Mrs.

Meredith?" he asked tremulously, but striving to quiet his tones to a steadiness hiding the interest he felt in her reply.

"What is it?"

"Do you—do you love your husband still?"

"Love him!" she uttered passionately, snatching her hand from his arm. "Love him still! *No!* I hate him as I do her! I have regarded him for years as unworthy my love, but still excused him somewhat, till within the last year. When I saw my child lie, I vowed solemnly never again to cherish a lenient thought toward him. *He was her murderer!* He has more than murdered—outraged, scorned, insulted me! How could I love him?"

He drew her arm within his once more in silence, and they turned toward the house. Presently he said:

"I will help you off as you desire, but you will communicate with me in the city?"

"No, no! I cannot."

"Why? I may be able to help you in some way. You will need a friend in your friendless situation, and I promise you to be true and faithful. Let me prove to you that I *can* be one, independent of interested motives. I now understand fully how widely we are separated. I will not distress you with my professions of love. Only let me befriend you, as I would have any one befriend my sister. Will you not promise this? I cannot let you go away so forlornly."

She hesitated, then gave him the promise of informing him of her whereabouts. He thanked her and added:

‘ One thing more. You cannot go away in the clandestine manner you contemplate. You must let my mother and Ellen know it. Take leave of them as you would of your best friends, and leave me to explain to them.’

They entered the house, and Theodore led her up stairs.

“ You have but little time to wait,” he said. “ Go to your room, get your things ready, and I will prepare them for your departure. Do not fear. All will go well, and none but ourselves will know that you are gone.”

He opened her door from the corridors, and she entered, thanking him gratefully. In a little while she had packed away the few things that were left out, and put on her wrappings. She had scarcely finished when the porter knocked at her door, and asked for her trunk. Then she turned toward the parlor, a sickening dread upon her spirits. What would they say? What could they think of this strange flight? She could hear their voices plainly, as if in discussion, Theodore’s above the rest, firm, strong, manly.

Two or three times her hand rested upon the door before she could muster courage to enter. When she did so, her heart beat heavily.

All of them were there. Ellen rose at once, and came up, putting her arms affectionately around her neck.

“ I am so sorry to lose you,” she said. “ So sorry that any trouble should call you away thus unexpectedly. But you must not forget us. You

have been a kind, good friend, and we will love you always."

Ora's grateful tears fell fast over the bright young head, laid lovingly against her neck in a farewell embrace. She had not expected this. She looked for surprise, distrust, perhaps anger.

Mrs. Raymond held out her hand and kissed her cheek. She looked bewildered, but asked no questions. Expressed herself grateful for the kind care her daughter had received at her hands, and bade her remember them as her friends. Mr. Raymond's manner was less cordial, more bewildered, but not distrustful. The leave taking was not half so bad as she had feared, and she took Theodore's arm in inexpressible relief, when he presented it, to see her to the cars.

"You will not forget your promises," he said gravely, as he seated her in the carriage and placed a card in her hand, "This is my address, and be sure to let me know as soon as I get to town, where you are. I have put what I owe you in this little purse. In your haste, you forgot I was indebted to you, and you may need it. Farewell. Do not forget I am your friend—always your friend to command."

For one moment he held her hand in both of his, reluctant to say good bye. But time was up, and why detain her? Five minutes later the cars were speeding away, and he stood alone under the quiet stars, miserable, half bewildered, and heart-sick.

When he returned to their rooms, all were eager for an explanation. At first he had told them only that sudden, unexpected and distressing news had

called her hence immediately, and bade them control their curiosity till she had gone. They must ask her no questions. He would explain as soon as he could get time. Now he sat down quietly, and told them in distinct terms what had occurred, and in such a manner as to enlist their feelings in her favor. He knew it was best to give them the truth. An excuse would have served only to excite suspicion. So the true state of affairs was known, and the Raymonds were her fast friends.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

BACK and forth beneath the trees where he had stood with Ora, paced Theodore Raymond. The quiet stars looked serenely upon him through the purpling foliage, and a low wind sighed softly around. But there was peace in neither for his troubled heart. He had fathomed the mystery at last! Had it brought him happiness? Here knowledge had stabbed him with a stab keener than the blow of an assassin, and he could not turn and resent it. It was his own work. He had wrung from her in her desperation, that which the proud lips for years refused to utter. Poor Ora. No need to be told that she had suffered. He could read a whole history of woe in the brief, passionate words that still rang in his ears. Her look of inexpressible misery; her passionate, trembling tones haunted him as a night-

mare. He felt as if he should never be able to banish them from his memory.

The picture he had seen that evening as she rushed from the stranger's room, rose up before him a hundred times in bitter reproach, as his footsteps beat a slow and regular measure to his stern self-examination. The fair and beautiful face of the woman as she stood in the doorway—the red lips wreathed in derision—her low, mocking laugh floating through the corridor—Ora's choking fear as she sprang forward like a hunted deer—her white lips quivering—her blue eyes wild with agony! And yet in that very moment he had confronted her in his anger and resentment, and had insulted her with an accusation humiliating to her high and lofty principles! He could have bitten his tongue to pieces for having uttered such words to her at that moment! The remembrance stung him till he ground his heel into the earth in passionate self-reproach, and denounced himself as a fool and pitiful coward.

Still, the revelation of this night had proved a blessing. He could understand and appreciate her now; and he could also see the ground on which he himself stood. No more would he have to walk forward blindly. A painful light was suddenly thrown across his path, and he saw that it led through loneliness and gloom.

Dawning day found him still out in the open air. He felt as if he could not breathe within the walls of his chamber. So he sat down upon a bench and watched the darkness fade away, while the gray dawn crept slowly over slumbering Nature, and

unsealed her eyes to look upon the glory of the New Day.

Brighter grew the light of morning. The golden sun rose majestically and flushed the east with a crimson glory, spreading his bright rays abroad over the varied scenes of earth, and lighting them into a splendor and magnificence beyond the power of mortal to express.

A long time he sat there. The hum of life rose all around him ere he rose and sought his chamber, though it was only for a change of dress, that his friends might not see a mark of carelessness by which his night vigil might be betrayed.

At the breakfast hour he joined his family as usual. Little was said except about their return home. Once Ellen reverted to Ora's departure and its cause, but he quieted her.

"Remember this is in confidence, Ellen, and should not be openly discussed. Nothing but a feeling of desperation could have driven her to reveal her wrongs, and we ought not openly to canvass them. Think what you will, but it were better to say nothing."

She accepted the reproof silently and conversation turned upon other topics.

"By the way," said Theodore, as he rose from the table, "Have you any objections, any of you, to my remaining for the evening train?"

"Why?" asked his father.

"Because, if not, I prefer to go on to-night. I have some little things I want to do before I go."

"I cannot imagine what you have found just at

this time to detain you," remarked Mr. Raymond in thoughtful surprise. "You were ready to go yesterday."

"So I was, father, but last night's event has changed my plans. It is connected with this sudden departure of Mrs. Meredith, and I am anxious to stay over to-day for my own satisfaction. You will not object?"

"Why, no. But it seems you take a great deal of interest in the matter."

"Indeed I do, sir. Mrs. Meredith, besides being a lady, and a kind, faithful friend to my sister, is a lonely, suffering woman, and I would befriend her in return for all she has done for us. She needs it, Heaven knows."

"How can you do anything—what can you do?" questioned Mrs. Raymond.

"What circumstances must determine, mother," he replied, gravely. "I cannot tell you what I propose even, now. You shall learn when I get home, however. You can go on this morning. I will only be a few hours behind you. My baggage can go through with yours, and I shall not be troubled with it."

"Kind!" laughed Ellen. "All the baggage you've got would harass you terribly. It is well to shift its responsibility upon us."

"Then I am to understand there is no objection?" said Theodore, without heeding her.

"None of consequence," replied his father. "If you want to stay, do so, but be sure to come on the next train."

Theodore saw them started, and then sauntered off leisurely. His object in remaining was to see what strangers arrived, and to endeavor to find out whether Ora's recreant husband was really coming for her rival.

Only three came on the morning train. Two were gentlemen, one a lady. In looking over the register he found their names: "A. Scott and lady;" "E. Piercelie." Could this be the man? If so, he had assumed a name to cover his presence. The next thing, however, was to ascertain which one of the newly arrived gentlemen bore the name, and direct his observations accordingly.

A little while later, the clerk accosted him as he passed by the office.

"Mr. Raymond, a gentleman has just been enquiring for Mrs. Meredith—did she return with your family?"

"No. She preceded them. Who is the gentleman?" he asked, feeling assured that he was on the right track, and that it was Ora's recreant husband, truly. Yet if he was there under an assumed name, and seeking to conceal it from her, why inquire for his wife as soon as he arrived. Some thought of mischief on the woman's part entered his mind, but scarcely had time to form itself into a definite shape.

"His name is Piercelie, and he is a stranger just in," responded the clerk. "I told him she was gone, and promised to get her address from you."

"I do not know it," answered Theodore, quietly. "She is no longer in our family, having voluntarily withdrawn, since my sister's recovery."

"Then you cannot give me the information he desires?"

"Of course not, since I do not myself know where she has gone."

"Then I will say as much to him," said the clerk, taking up his pen, and Theodore strayed about the office for sometime, hoping he might come back to make further inquiry. Where was he now? Up stairs, doubtless, with the woman he came to see. "The witch has completely enthralled him, I suppose," he muttered.

The day passed fruitlessly as regarded the success of his object. No further inquiries were made, and the stranger was invisible. The time was fast approaching when he must give over his watch, and he felt annoyed at not having seen Mr. Piercelie, that he might himself judge of his character by his face. He had a suspicion that the woman had been playing off some trick on the poor wife, and might not have uttered the truth—a suspicion the inquiry of the morning tended somewhat to encourage. But while he stood musing upon the matter, the light patter of footsteps and little peals of laughter behind him, warned him of the siren's presence, and he looked around quickly.

She came forward habited for traveling, leaning upon the arm of a gay, handsomely dressed young man, whose laugh mingled with hers. Theodore's hot blood boiled as he saw him bend his head towards her with those wreathing smiles, as if fearing to lose a word or tone of her voice. Could Ora ever have loved a man like that? Surely, she must

have been beside herself, or a child who knew not what to accept as worthy a true woman's devotion. He was one of the most insignificant of beings, having nothing but his dress to recommend him. His face was insipid—his drawling tones silly and foppish. "*Could* that man have been her husband—once loved and honored?"

Another lady and gentleman followed. "Mr. and Mrs. Scott," thought the young man as they passed. A girlish, gentle face, a slight figure and ladylike manners were distinguishable, while the gentleman, a grave, dignified looking man, walked at her side thoughtfully, his eyes roving about aimlessly over the little crowd. He had no eyes for them, however. A passing glance satisfied him. The others engrossed all his attention.

He got into the same car, and took a seat near them. They still laughing and chatting gaily about everything but *her*. But never once did the sound of her name reach him. They had ignored her existence. Wrapped up in themselves, they thought of nothing beside.

At Albany he lost sight of them when they entered the boat, but he had seen enough. If dim resolves had been struggling to shape themselves in his mind before, they faded now utterly. He could never expect to find any good in a man like that, and the thought of a reconciliation in which he might interest himself, in case Ora had been deceived, made him laugh. Had she not declared she hated him? Well she might, were he not an object too pitiful for so strong an emotion. He

seemed, to his prejudiced eyes, only fit for scorn and contempt.

Three or four days passed away after his return, ere Ora fulfilled her promise. Then a note was put into his hands, which informed him of her retreat. She had sought a distant part of the city, where she had taken refuge for a few days until she could find a situation, and if he wished to see her, he was at liberty to call at any time suited best to his convenience.

He lost no time in availing himself of that permission, taking Ellen with him to prove their continued friendship and interest, and to show her how earnestly he meant to adhere to his promise, independent of interested motives.

They found her looking pale and wan. Trouble was telling on her fast now. Her tones faltered painfully, and her hands shook in their grasp as she greeted them. She appeared restless, feverish, and half wild, throughout the whole interview. Their fears for her health were roused at once, and he said decidedly:

“You are not well, and must come home with us till you are strong again. This will never do. We must take care of you. It is only right, and we will hear no refusal.”

Ellen joined him eagerly, but Ora shook her head sadly.

“I have no right to trespass upon you. I should be an intruder, and feel worse than to remain here. I thank you, but cannot accept your kind offer.”

"Indeed you can, and must," asserted Ellen, positively. "We shall all be glad to have you, and if you fall ill, which you look inclined to do, I will be your little nurse."

"But how would your mother like such hasty arrangements," returned Ora, striving to speak lightly. "She would not thank me for usurping your time, I feel assured."

"Not thank you! She will feel delighted to think I am making some return for what you did for me. Do come home with me. I will take nice care of you."

"Thank you, but indeed I cannot."

Ora was positive now. She was thinking of the time when she had sought the father's aid, and he had turned her coldly from him without even a word of sympathy or encouragement. She felt it impossible ever to go across the threshold of his home again. He had forgotten her, but she could never forget. Past cruelty had left its sting. Now, even had she the right they asserted, she would not accept his hospitality.

"Suppose you should fall ill here amongst utter strangers," said Theodore, still urging the point. "You may not get proper attention."

"Then I can die," she answered drearily. "After all, it would be the sweetest boon I could ask. There is no more peace for me here."

"Do not despair thus," he returned. "A man like the one you called husband, is not worth such sorrow as you feel. He deserves only your contempt."

She looked up quickly, a crimson flush spreading over her pale face.

"Why do you say this to me?" she asked haughtily. "You are the last one to speak disparagingly of him. I should think some delicacy of feeling would seal your lips on such a subject."

"Do not mistake me, Mrs. Meredith. I speak only from personal observation, without any other motive than to comfort you. My family know the whole affair. I have told them, that you may be justified and befriended. I have brought my sister to prove it to you, and assure you most solemnly I had no other thought."

His tones were so full of earnest and anxious meaning, Ellen was puzzled to understand them. Ora, however, bowed silently, and nothing further was said on the subject. They remained but a short time after this, and Ellen took an affectionate leave, saying she would come again very soon.

As soon as they were gone, Ora went to her room and put on her bonnet and cloak. Every day since her return, she had visited Ada's grave, and she was going to it now. She had done little else than weep, and brood over her troubles, and half the time it was upon the little mound that covered all she loved on earth.

Drawing her veil over her face, she wended her way to the Cemetery sadly. The sexton held the gate open for her to pass in, turning to look after her as she glided among the tombs to that little grave in the distant corner beneath the trees. She had made her last visit the evening previous, and had knelt

down beside the simple stone, resting her hot face upon the narrow block of marble that bore the one sweet name she might yet utter without a sting of shame. Now, in the place of that little stone, was a handsome head piece, surrounded by a wreath of half-open buds, and bearing upon the side the form of an angel just lifting her snowy wings towards the heavens—its burthen the spirit of a little child. Clear, large letters standing out on the pure surface, gave tangible utterance to the cry of her inmost soul: "My Lost Ada." Who had done this? What friendly hand had placed it there, and hung over the top a festoon of natural flowers? Her heart swelled and throbbed tumultuously! There was but one person who could have remembered her dead. That was Theodore Raymond. What had prompted him to do this? A simple desire to gratify her most sacred wishes in regard to her child.

She could scarcely think in her surprise, and sat down, bewildered and uncertain.

"Oh, Ada! Yes, my lost darling," she cried, bending her face to the green sod. "What have I left to me now? And yet," she added desperately, after a moment's pause, "I would not recall you—no—not for worlds. Even in my loneliness, I thank God that He has spared you, my little blossom! An angel of Heaven, thou wilt wait me there, my baby! At least there is something to look forward to in the future! An hour when the grave shall receive me kindly, and we shall be reunited, never to part."

"And does not that thought comfort you?" said a voice near her. "Surely it were enough to strengthen

us in all the trials of life—that meeting beyond this ‘vale of tears’ where there shall be no more sorrow!”

She looked up to find Theodore Raymond by her side, his hat raised reverently—his noble forehead bared and uplifted toward that heaven where his eyes seemed to seek a glimpse of that land he pictured.

“Oh, Mr. Raymond! you here?” she faltered. “I did not know you were near. Yet I am glad,” she added as she rose to her feet. “I wanted to speak about this—” pointing to the head stone. “I am so surprised and bewildered, I do not know what to think. Was it you who did it?”

He could not evade a positive answer, even had he wished it so he smiled quietly, and replied in his frank, earnest manner which was so winning:

“Yes, it was I who did it, my friend. I knew that it would be your wish to arrange something of this kind, and I rightly judged that you would come here often. The day I came home I selected this and had the lines cut in it. To-day it was brought here by my order, and placed over the grave. You must forgive me the liberty, Mrs. Meredith. It has given me much pleasure to do this in remembrance of one so dear to you; and I felt that no tribute of gratitude on my part, for past kind services from you, could be as acceptable as this.”

“But this is too kind. You lay me under obligation for so much.”

“On the contrary you must allow me to say that it is I—and all dear to me, who are under obligation to you.”

"No, no, how can that be? You have paid me well for all I have been able to do—more than paid me in kindness and regard. I feel overwhelmed with this favor. Indeed, I wish you had not done it!"

Her look of distress was sincere and Theodore hastened to say:

"Pray, pray do not look upon it in the light of a favor. I have done it as I would have done anything for Ellen which I thought would gratify her."

She was not satisfied. He saw it by her look, and divined something of her feelings, as she stood with the air of uncertainty and bewilderment which had not left her since the discovery. It was a delicate matter to venture a reference to the past, else he would have assured her of his sympathy apart from his love. He would have told her to forget that he had ever made the declaration of a warmer sentiment than mere friendship, and in trusting his truth and honor, allow him a friend's privileges.

But this he must not utter. He could only murmur a sorrowful regret for having pained her.

"No, no; it is not that, exactly. You have not pained me—but I feel perplexed and embarrassed. I cannot let you do such things for me. I could not accept gifts like this from you, and it will be a long time ere I am able to pay you what this cost."

"Pray, say no more about it," pleaded Theodore pained beyond measure to find his effort to gratify her, met in such a manner. He had not thought of the view she might take of it, when he obeyed the impulse he had conceived, to have the tombstone

placed there. "If," he added, "you ever feel able to spare the trifle I expended upon it, for your own satisfaction, I will not refuse to take it. But you must give yourself no trouble or inconvenience. I may never want a dollar of it, and it were better used thus, than lying useless or thrown away."

"I thank you," she replied giving him her hand while large tears coursed slowly down her cheeks. "You are so kind and thoughtful, I ought not to pain you with such rebellious pride. Yet I cannot help it. Do not think me ungrateful."

Gathering shadows were advancing, and fell over the sable robes that rustled so softly near him; and as he looked into her sad face and felt the tremulous motion of the little hands he clasped, a longing impulse to draw the poor weary head upon his breast, rose mightily in his heart. But he must choke it down—give no utterance to the wish, even by a sigh. She was the wife of another, and the tie, though false and cruel, was as binding as though she had been the loved and loving object that could make the union between them perfect. Must this last forever? Must he always stand aloof, loving her with his whole soul, seeing her lonely, and wretched, and not permitted to comfort her? See her toil, and not be able to relieve her of care? Passionate resentment against such a life filled his soul. He felt that he must speak out against it. It overmastered every thought beside, and still clasping the tiny fingers, he gave utterance to his feelings, in spite of the prudent resolves he had maintained up to this last moment.

"Mrs. Meredith, you must let me speak to you a moment, and forgive me if I wound you. I cannot bear to see you so lonely and forlorn—imposing upon yourself a sacrifice too great for the cause that prompts it. Do you intend always to adhere to such a course as you are pursuing? Will you let one who is so unworthy of a single thought, poison your whole life and make it lonely and miserable? I would not dare to ask it, had I not witnessed his faithlessness in the devotion with which he bent over your rival, and seemed to hang upon every word. I am not saying this to bias you. It is only just. Why not free yourself—sever all this forever, and secure to yourself a peaceful future at last, untainted by the dread of his persecutions. It is your right."

She looked at him wildly, with the startled air of one who had received an unexpected blow.

"Free myself," she repeated. "Do you mean apply for a divorce?"

"Yes. Why not? He is no more your husband, except in name, than if he had never seen you. He is heartless—soulless—faithless. He is a clog upon your actions, and the dread of your existence. You wrong yourself in leading such a life."

"A divorced wife! I, a divorced wife!" She exclaimed, shudderingly. "Oh, no! never, never! Anything but that! We were pledged over the dead. Till *death* severs the tie that bound us, I am his wife still in name, if not in heart. It does not matter. Why should I wish the law to free me? While he lived I could never marry another. There

could be no other advantage in freedom. No, no. Do not speak of it."

"But if he seeks you, and claiming you, harasses your life till it becomes a burthen? You could secure yourself from this. Can you hold thus intact the ties that bind you to a man you hate?"

"Yes, sooner than break a vow uttered over the dead body of one who was more than a father to me—sooner than stand before a public tribunal and claim justice of the world, while its cold, cruel eyes surveyed me in doubt—perhaps incredulity and scorn! Oh, I beg you, say no more. It is impossible for me to follow your suggestions. I can suffer as I have suffered—perhaps die in the effort to endure, but I cannot do what you ask!"



CHAPTER XXXV.

THE next day was stormy, and Ora was unable to go out. The wind sighed drearily around the buildings, and the rain plashing against the windows made her start and shudder, when she remembered how the storm was beating above a little head that had once lain so lovingly against her bosom. Each day as it passed, served to bring renewed longings for that precious child whose release had been a blessing. While her judgment told her that it was far better that she should have been removed from a world of care, her poor heart in its solitude craved something

to fill the void made by the crushing out of every living hope.

She had lain silently upon the sofa nearly all day long, too weak and indisposed to stir, since there was no possibility of getting out. A little fire had been kindled in her grate, and sent a bright glow through the room, but its light showed a pale and wretched countenance reposing on the velvet cushion—the brow contracted, and the lines of the mouth drawn tightly in an expression of weariness and suffering very pitiful to behold.

“Ah! if the end would but come!” she moaned inwardly. “How can I bear it longer? I would I could die! Oh, Father, give me rest?”

And even as she prayed, the “end” was drawing nigh—the end of existing circumstances.

The tinkling of the bell sounded below, and she got up to look out. A carriage was drawn up before the door, and she could see that some one stood upon the steps waiting admittance. She could not distinguish the person, however, for the umbrella concealed him almost from view.

In a moment a knock came upon her door.

“Some one for me,” she thought. “Who can have come in this storm?”

It was Theodore. He sent up his card, and begged to see her only for a moment. A sickening sensation came over her.

“Tell him he must excuse me,” she said to the servant. “I am not well and cannot come down. Oh, why does he persist in torturing me?” she cried, throwing herself upon the sofa again with her face in

the pillows. "Can he not see that this life is killing me?"

The servant came back almost immediately.

"He says he is very anxious to see you. It is important. He has news, and can't you let him come up, if you are too ill to come down?"

She raised both hands and pressed them over her brow with a gesture of despair.

"Say then that I will come down, Mary. What can he have to say now? Oh, I wish I might be left in peace," she ejaculated passionately, as the door closed on the girl.

He was standing by the mantel as she came in, his hat in his hand, looking anxiously towards the entrance of the parlor. Coming forward at once, he held out his hand and said feelingly:

"I am so sorry you are indisposed. I should not have dared to intrude upon you after hearing it, but I bring you news."

"News? Of what nature? But why need I ask? No *good* news *can* come to me now."

"You are too hasty. I think it is good. I have found some of your old friends."

"My old friends?" she repeated, "who can you mean?"

"The Cliftons. Why did you not tell us before that you knew them? I met the doctor to-day, and learned it by accident."

Ora had flushed crimson, then paled again. Theodore led her to a seat, and made her sit down.

"You look as if I had struck you," he said, half smilingly. "Is it such bad news to know that I have

discovered where you used to live before I knew you?"

"Do you know all?" she faltered.

"Yes, all. You are a brave woman to bear all you had to suffer there, Mrs. Meredith. But you have long been justified."

"Justified, did you say? Oh, Mr. Raymond, then they at last believe in my innocence!" she gasped, clasping her hands, and looking up at him as he stood before her.

"Yes, and have, for a long, long time. They sought you vainly for a considerable period after you left, knowing how you had been wronged. They are eager to assure you of their good feeling."

"How did it all come about?" she asked.

"In this way. When Ellen was ill, I called in Dr. Clifton, and took him into my confidence. He attended her, and since our return and an explanation of affairs as they now stand, has been to see us. To-day I met him again, and incidentally, in speaking of my sister, mentioned your name. He caught it instantly, and questioned me about you with great interest. The whole story came out in the conversation, and I learned everything. When Guy Bartoni's villainy was revealed, they came to the conclusion that you had been aware of the fact, and that was the cause of his attempts to injure you. Was it not so?"

"Yes. I learned by accident that he had a wife living before I came to New York. He feared that I would expose him."

"Which you should have done. That is the only

thing the doctor blames you for. He thinks you should have told them at once."

"To have done that would have been to lay open to them many incidents I preferred not to relate, and I could not bring myself to do it. Besides, I was a stranger, unknown to them, while he was the betrothed of the daughter, and had every advantage on his side. What right had I to expect them to believe me against him? He did not hesitate at falsehood and deceit when it served his purpose."

"At any rate, he could scarcely have made matters worse than they became in the end. You had a right to defend yourself."

Ora said nothing. There were things of which she might not speak to him, even in excuse. He continued:

"I have some further news for you. When you are able, I am commissioned to bring you around to see poor little Agnes Montes, who has since your departure been fast fading away. She loved you better than any one on earth, the doctor says, and her whole cry is for you. I wanted to take you to-day."

"Aggie! Is she then so ill? Oh, poor child—dear little friend. I will go to her at once! She alone clung to me in my sorrow and distress! And all this time she has never forgotten me! Dear, dear Agnes!?"

She was moved strongly now.

"Are you able to go to-day? Do not overrate your ability," said Theodore.

"Is she dangerously ill?"

"Yes, so I gathered from the doctor."

"Then I must go now. I will not think of myself. Wait for me. I will not keep you long."

In a short time she returned well wrapped up, and he placed her in the carriage, carefully striving to shield her from the rain, which was still falling. She could with difficulty realize the sudden changes she was constantly experiencing now—they followed so rapidly one upon another.

They were expecting her, for Dr. Clifton had arranged with Theodore to bring her that day. Lina, much changed, but the same loving-hearted being as ever, met her with a warm embrace, and wept freely as she held her to her bosom. The Doctor held both hands and looked down at her with sympathy and feeling shadowed forth in face and manner.

"Fortune still buffets you, evidently," he said. "You are worn to a shadow. Welcome back to peace and rest."

She could not answer. Her heart was too full. Faces and objects so familiar moved her beyond utterance, and she could only clasp the friendly hand, and give vent to her feelings in tears.

"Oh, how much we have thought of you, how much we have wanted you," said Madeline as she led her into the chamber where Agnes lay. "This poor child has been wild about you. We had to tell her that you were coming, to quiet her, for we knew the end was drawing near, and her pitiful pleadings nearly broke our hearts. It was a Providence that sent you back to us."

"Oh, what a pitiful wreck!"

Ora's heart ached as she bent over the little form stretched upon the bed, and felt the feeble arms twine about her neck, as a glad cry broke from the child's lips.

"A wreck indeed!" added Madeline almost bitterly. "Oh, it seems almost incredible. Our whole household has changed! You have heard the sad story—Guy dead, and by my brother's hand—that brother a lonely wanderer and exile from his native land. It has been very hard to sustain life with all this misery to contend against. And now Aggie! oh, my poor child!"

She bowed her head upon the pillows and sobbed. Long suffering had nearly worn away her strength to endure patiently these successive trials.

Theodore left after a short conversation with Dr. Clifton, and then the latter came up stairs. Mutual explanations followed, and the evening drew on rapidly, ere they were aware. Ora could note a very great change in every member of the family, now that she could regard them more attentively. She had not been alone in her sorrow. Others had felt the weight of its heavy hand almost as keenly. Even wild, rattling Kate was quiet and subdued, her young face shadowed with a thoughtfulness that was saddening to see.

Seated by Agnes, her hands clasping the frail little palms, she told them her own story, and listened to all they had to tell her in return. They were not yet done, when a summons to tea interrupted them, and they deferred the conclusion till afterward.

"Don't leave me, please," pleaded Agnes as the

summons came. "It has been so long to wait, I can't have you leave me now. Let them bring it up."

"Yes, do," said Madeline. "You look weak and ill yourself. I must go down with papa, but I will send yours to you. Try to rest a little."

Ora suffered them to do as they wished, and remained. Agnes drew her down to her closely:

"Oh, I am so happy to have you all to myself a moment," she murmured as they went out. "I wanted you, till my heart broke in its longing. You don't know how much I love you, or you would have come back."

"But I have come back, my love, and now you will get well," said Ora, cheerfully, trying to keep down her tears at the child's sad tones.

"No, I shall not. You have come too late to save me. I grieved till I could not bear it. But you are here to say good-bye, and I am so glad and happy. I can thank God that you are come. I tried to be patient, but I could not. It was so cruel to have you wronged and driven from me. I was a wicked girl then. Oh, you can't imagine what black thoughts I have had in my heart! I despised—I hated them all for what they had done!"

"But you don't feel so now, do you, Aggie? That is wrong."

"No, I don't feel so any more. I felt changed every way, after awhile. I got sorry for being such a trouble to those who were so kind to me, and tried to be good. It was hard to do, but I did it as well as I could. Everybody had so much trouble I tried to forget mine and help them. Lina was so sorrowful,

and yet so patient with me when I was naughty, I was ashamed; and after awhile I grew to love her dearly. I think I lovè everybody now, and I did not like any one but you at one time. I wonder why it is so?"

"It is because you have learned to understand things better, and can appreciate the kindness and love of your friends," responded Ora, smoothing back the black tresses from the child's pale brow. "Do you think, Aggie, that you would like to leave them? You said just now you could not get well. Are you afraid to die?"

"No, not *afraid*, but I do not want to die now. I feel as if I would love to stay with you all, but it dont matter much. I am not like other girls, and would never be happy like them."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because I feel things so deeply. They hurt me so easily, and I am so easy to get angry and unhappy over things that do not go right as I want them. If I set my heart on anything and could not have it—or do it, I should go wild. I think God knows what is best for me, and that is the reason He is taking me away."

Was this a little child talking so gravely and so earnestly, resigning herself to the will of an overruling power without murmuring? Passing from the dawn of earthly existence into the mysteries of an unknown world fearlessly! What a beautiful lesson in the example the child was teaching as her young life ebbed away!

She talked to her till the others came up, partaking

but lightly of the supper brought her in the interval, and afterwards watching with them till late.

Before dawn Agnes grew weak, and continued so the following day. The night succeeding, her spirit passed quietly to that "unknown world," where so many Ora had loved had gone before, leaving nothing behind but the frail casket which she clasped in her arms in a passionate burst of grief. One more tie was severed, never to be united again on earth.



CHAPTER XXXVI.

ANOTHER week went round, and Ora was once more installed in Dr. Clifton's household as of old, only now she was understood and appreciated. Had Harry been at home, she would never have gone back, but he was a wanderer for an indefinite period, and she had no place to go to, and the asylum offered was very tempting in her sadness and loneliness. There was double sweetness in the kind and affectionate treatment she received, now that the stain had been cleared from her name, and she found herself more than restored to their esteem and love.

One evening shortly after her removal, she donned bonnet and shawl, and taking a bouquet of late flowers she had obtained for the purpose, she wended her way to Ada's grave, where she went almost every day. A singular pleasure always awaited her there. She loved to scatter flowers over her child's resting place, and now that Aggie was laid beside her at

her earnest request, she was drawn to the spot with a feeling as if she was going to meet and talk with her dear ones. It was after four o'clock when she arrived at the Cemetery, and though cool, the day was clear and bright. She sat down upon the little mound, green and beautiful, strewing her flowers lovingly over it. Then she dropped her face upon her hands, and soon lost herself in a sad retrospection of the past.

At length a heavy sigh, more resembling a groan of anguish, caused her to start and look up. Then a smothered cry broke from her lips, and she half rose to her feet with clasped hands, and face white as death. A strange form was towering above her, an agitated face, white as her own, pictured against the clear sky in bold relief.

"Nina," said a husky voice, "Nina, is it thus we meet at last?"

She could not speak or move. Like one frozen to ice, she stared at him in her terror and agony. He repeated again, pleadingly:

"Oh, Nina, will you not speak to me? You have not forgotten. I see that you know me, even though long years of suffering have changed us both."

"Aye!" now broke from her lips. "It *has* changed us—myself particularly. But whose work was it, Edward Piercelie! Who brought that suffering upon us both?"

"It was I. I would not try to deny it if I could; but may not years of remorse and penitence wipe out the one sin and error of my life. Oh, Nina, if you knew how those years have been passed, you would

pity me—you would come to me, and giving me your hand, say in your own sweet childlike way as of old, “Edward, I forgive you.”

“No, that cannot be. It is too late. The time for such words has passed. They were sealed upon my lips the day I buried my daughter here, and knew that it was your perfidy which had opened for her an untimely grave! Had you been true to one of the most sacred ties of nature—she had not died amongst strangers without food or medicine, and been forced to owe her very resting place to a stranger’s charity! Had you been true, I had not fled from your home and become a wanderer—compelled to labor for my daily bread—suffer wrong and misconception—be insulted with suspicion, and become the object of pursuit for base and soulless beings, to whose mercy you consigned me when you cast me off for another! Oh, how can I remember all this, and then, because you come to me and say you have suffered, say that I forgive you! No! I will never utter the words! You may suffer, if you indeed can, which I doubt. Fresh from the presence of her for whom I was abandoned, I cannot believe that you can come to me with any other feeling than to devise some new mode of torture for my future! What have I done that you should thus persecute me? Why have you followed me here? Has Alice Murray’s fascination lost its power? Where is she now, that you are not beside her?”

She spoke rapidly, vehemently — passionately. His tones were humble and yet tender as he endeavored to reply.

“Nina, why wrong me? Surely, if I have sinned, it is not to that extent your words would convey. I know not where Alice Murray is. She left the day after you fled, and from that day I never saw her, until a short time ago. I heard of her at times, but held no communication. When you left, it broke the spell she had woven about me, and I was a miserable man—the most miserable that breathed the breath of life. I sought you everywhere. Our neighbors could tell me nothing—strangers could tell me nothing—no trace or clue could I find to guide me, and at length was forced to abandon a fruitless search. I thought you dead, that you had killed yourself in your misery, and through all these years I have been a hermit, feeling as if I bore upon my brow the mark of Cain, even worse, for one dearer than a brother, has been my helpless victim. It was but a little time since, that I heard that you were alive. Alice, traveling North, accidentally discovered you, recognized, and made inquiries concerning your employments and position. She wrote me a letter, telling me how I might find you at Saratoga. No need to repeat her account. The thought that you were alive filled my soul with but one desire, and I hastened there, only to find you gone. I tried then to get your address, but failed. They told me then that you had left Mr. Raymond’s, and I knew not how to seek you, but I heard that he resided here, and I followed hoping for some intelligence. I have been unsuccessful until now—must have been for some time, probably, had I not seen you as you came in here, and recognized you. Oh, Nina, I felt that in the sight of you at last, God had answered my

prayer, and I was forgiven. I could scarcely refrain from flying to you and clasping you in my arms! But I dared not, till you, too, had spoken my forgiveness. Will you not speak it now? Will you not put your hand once in mine? I ask it for the sake of the old happiness that for a little while was ours."

He advanced and held out his hand, his whole frame tremulous with emotion, but she shrank back.

"No, I cannot. You ask too much. My heart is steeled against you. I loved you once, with a love as strong as death—I would have died to prove that love, but you trampled it under foot as worthless! Oh, shall I ever be able to forget your own words? Shall I tell you what you said—how you told *her* you had never loved me—called me a silly child, and deemed me 'incapable of the great love that could enrich your life!' Do you forget your loving protestations, your kisses and vows of affection, and when *she* pitied me, bade her not mention my name! Must I give you a history of what I suffered then—how with my heart breaking I went to my room, and took my child from the roof once sacred—then desecrated? How I stole forth in the night and walked with my innocent burthen to the nearest station, and there, unperceived, took the cars that bore me away from you! How after that, I labored through weary months of toil and study to make myself fit for some situation by which I might keep my child from want? Oh, those were bitter days. I went to a little southern town, and engaged teachers. I took my most valuable jewels and sold them that I might have the means to live and at the same time acquire those branches of know-

ledge I required. Labor and study was not the worst of my trials. A wicked man saw my loneliness and persecuted me with humiliating attentions. He was a musician, and I took lessons of him in singing. He was gentlemanly at first—then patronising, then familiar, and I resented it. He grew angry at this, said he was no music teacher, but a gentleman of leisure, and had been struck with my pretty face and glorious voice, and sought thus to be near me and win my interest. Things began to look dark at length. Several months had passed, and I had overtaxed myself bodily and mentally. I fell ill. It was then that a little child—a boy, was prematurely born, and that, too, I must lay up against you. *You* killed him, Edward Piercelie! Another evil grew out of this! That man found it out, and made it the pretext of suspicion and insult. He reported maliciously that I had been false, and my husband had cast me off! *I*, mind you! Oh, I laughed, even, in my bitterness then, to think how *I* was slandered. Am I not running up a score against you, that will stand a wall of adamant forever, between us? *You* were the cause of all! None of this had come, had you not driven me from you with your faithlessness. I did not realize it all then. It was a long time ere I learned to look upon you in a true light. I even loved you till Ada sickened and died. Then my whole soul turned. I could bear no more. You had stood an idol, but your image shattered to irreclaimable dust over her tomb! Then, I despised and hated you. I cannot help it. I have cause. The toil of years—the poverty, disgrace—death—all, all come

between you now and one softening emotion. I will never forgive you—never! Go! leave me in peace!”

“Nina, Nina! have pity! Do not say that you will *not* forgive me. Take time, consider, but do not condemn. I am not as guilty as you deem me! Oh, I cannot bear to live on unforgiven. Here, over the body of our dead child, I plead for pity!”

“Aye! murder her, then turn to the heart-broken mother and crave pardon for the deed. Bring up the other also, and make him a plea too! You murdered them both, and I, their mother, may listen to you when you bid me pity you in remembrance of them.”

She laughed a wild, bitter laugh. Excitement had turned her brain, almost. Her feelings had risen till reason was overpowered. She could think of nothing in this hour but a long catalogue of woes, and it had steeled her heart against him. He now stood shaking, with bowed head, before her.

“I can bring no justification but my deep penitence,” he murmured chokingly. “Will it have no weight with you?”

She lifted her hand with an imperious gesture, cold incredulity and scorn stamped upon her haughty face.

“I have no faith in your penitence! You tell me that through all these years, you have been a miserable hermit believing me dead. You say accident discovered me to Alice Murray, and she wrote you. When you fly to find me, but learning after one brief inquiry that I have left the place, you turn and devote yourself to Alice as of old. Why, if you bring to me a penitent heart, did you not prove it in your

actions You did not leave her side all day. You took her upon your arm at starting from the place, and hung upon her every word. In the cars you ignored any other existence but hers—were blind to everything but her presence. But now, having, as you thought, escaped observation, you hunt me down, and bring a false protestation of penitence. Sir, what can be your object in this?"

He looked like one amazed, and could with difficulty comprehend her meaning.

"I cannot understand you," he replied at length. "I have never been guilty of what you impute to me. Some one has deceived you, but how, I cannot imagine, or for what purpose. There is no one who knows me, that I am aware of, in this part of the country. And if I had been seen and recognized, it would not have been in such a way as you name, engaged. I saw Alice when we left Saratoga, but she was not on my arm. After a short interview that morning, I did not see her all day. I was in my room, too ill to stir. I was too thoroughly unmanned by disappointment to do anything till the cars started. When at last, the weary day came to a close, and I went down, I met Mr. Scott, his sister, and Alice. They were in the White Mountains all summer, and had got as far as New York on their return, when they learned that Alice, instead of joining them there as arrangements had been made to do, had stopped at Saratoga, and they returned for her. The party she was with, had gone on, and she telegraphed them for their escort home. The lady on my arm was Miss Scott—the gentleman with Alice, her brother, whose wealth is

sufficient attraction without the wit, which he lacks in a sad degree. She married him in this city as they went through, and you might have seen the notice in the papers had you looked ; and by this time they are home. Believe me, it was not I, as you have been led to believe, who was by her. Who could have mistaken him for me ?”

“It was no mistake. A friend informed me, who is incapable of falsehood,” she replied, still incredulous seemingly to every assertion.

“Then you will not believe me ?”

“No. If I did, I should still be as far from a disposition to listen. I have no fancy to be lenient, because Alice Murray may have cast you off for a new face and fortune. You could not marry her, and she has thought more prudently of her course, and has wisely, if you speak truth, married a fool. She does not deserve even such good fortune as to have a fool for a husband, but may save herself by attaching him to her.”

“Will you not tell me who this friend was, who told you, he said,” unheeding her last remark.

“No, what does it matter ? I believe him ; that is sufficient. I repeat that he is incapable of falsehood, and I know you differently.”

“It was a gentlemen, and one whom you regard with deep interest,” he faltered brokenly. “Perhaps one you love, and that is what has hardened you. Is it so ?”

She was silent.

“Is it true ?” he cried, passionately, “and must I leave you—unloved—unpitied—unforgiven ! Will you have no pity !”

“Go !” she simply uttered.

His hand was slowly uplifted, and pressed his forehead as if a blow had fallen upon it and he would ease the pain by the action. His face was pallid as marble.

"Oh," he groaned bitterly. "I am justly punished, but I cannot bear it. Oh, Nina, Nina, my wife, come back to me—believe me—pity me! I have told you but truth! By all my hopes of heaven I swear it. Do not cast me off so hopelessly. At least say one word of forgiveness!"

"I have said what I mean. Go," she articulated in cold, measured tones.

"I cannot, till you say at least you will try to forgive me. Nina, I have wronged you bitterly, but not enough to justify you in unforgiving hatred of me. I cannot go down into my grave in peace till you have pardoned my sin."

Still immovable as marble! Had she been of stone she could not have appeared more unfeeling, and as her iciness increased, his excitement rose in proportion. He was almost wild and incapable of self-control.

"You have learned to be inhuman," he cried vehemently, "else you could not listen to me so totally unmoved. Nina, if you have one spark of feeling left, I pray you hear me for the last time. Let me tell you again how I suffered, and how, when I gained tidings of you, I hastened with a wild, glad hope in my heart, to call you mine once more. Once you were so gentle and forgiving, a word would have restored me to your confidence and love, and remembering this, though my sin was deep, is it a wonder if I hoped to win you back when I had confessed my wrong freely and offered you more than the devotion

of a life in expiation. I would be your slave, anything you wished, only for the happiness of hearing you speak one forgiving word. Oh, speak it, speak it, I implore you, for the love of Heaven, lest I go mad! Nina, I am a man no longer, but a child, dying at your feet, with the agony you inflict! If you will not pity me, think of yourself. Will you ever know peace again, when still without a word of pity, you see me borne to my grave, and know that your hand sent me there?"

Her lip curled scornfully. Was he in hopes of gaining anything by working on her fears? Her time had come now. Had she a desire for revenge, she could ask for no more power to inflict it than at this moment, and the desire that had taken temporary possession of her, urged her on to its completion. A sarcastic, scornful laugh grated upon his ear, and she said derisively:

"Go on, Edward Piercelie. You improve wonderfully. You would make a fine tragic actor. You have such a fine flow of words, and could so easily take hold upon the feelings of a 'susceptible' audience. I regret that I cannot enter into the spirit of your touching address more fully. Unfortunately, your early lessons, and long contact with trying scenes in daily life, have rendered me impervious to such emotions as you would excite in a less experienced person."

"Then farewell," he uttered with a sudden effort at calmness. "May you never plead at God's mercy seat as vainly for forgiveness, as I have plead with you."

He turned his face from her, and for one moment bent his knee beside the grave of his child. His pale lips moved, as if in prayer, and then lifting a flower from the mound which she had so lately scattered there, he placed it in his bosom reverently, and with one last look of unspeakable sorrow, he murmured again a sad farewell as he turned away.

"Farewell, Nina, once my wife, now lost to me forever. Farewell. You will never be troubled with me more."

He went away slowly, turning but once before he reached the gate, and looking back as if in hopes she would relent and recall him. But she stood still and unmoved, and he disappeared through the gate.

As he passed from her sight, something like pity stole into her heart. A slight revolution of feeling made her sink back with a moan upon the mound, and resting her forehead against the cold marble, breathe a half articulated prayer:

"God forgive me if I have sinned."

She did not heed the passage of time, and it sped swiftly away. It was night before she was aware. She was startled, at length, when she looked up, to see how dark it was growing, and with a heavy sigh, rose and drew her mantle around her.

She found the gate of the cemetery locked when she reached it, and was forced to ring the bell before she could get out. The sexton came out of his little cottage, looking surprised at sight of her.

"I thought you had gone, when I closed and locked the gate," he said, but without answer she went out silently, and turned her steps homeward.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SLOWLY and sadly she ascended to her chamber, when she reached Dr. Clifton's. Madeline came up to her almost immediately.

"I am so glad you have come," she said. "I was growing so uneasy about you. You are too weak to venture away from home so long. I will not let you do it in future."

The kind hearted girl went and put her arms around her affectionately, and Ora dropped her head against her bosom, a feeling of grateful emotion and remorse contending in her breast. The sad tones of that last farewell were ringing now in her ears, and had stirred again the frozen fountains of her better nature. Already, in the brief space of time she had to reflect upon what had passed, she had made up her mind to tell him, if they should meet again, that she forgave him. But that was all she could do. Receive him again in confidence—restore him to her affection was impossible. Nothing but the dead ashes of the old love remained in her heart. She would not even try to rekindle the flame, were it in her power. He had said truly, that she was "lost to him forever."

"Are you ill?" asked Lina, anxiously, as she received Ora's weary head and lovingly stroked back

her hair. "You are either sick or very tired. Which is it?"

"Both sick and tired, dear Madeline. Life's trials will never have an end but in the grave," she replied, drearily. "Oh! dear!"

"Why, what has happened?" said Lina, really beginning to feel alarmed.

Ora lifted her white face with a momentary expression of its former stony bitterness.

"He has followed me here—followed me, and found me out at last. He has even ventured to stand upon the sacred ground hallowed by the remains of his innocent, helpless victim—desecrating it by his presence!"

"Whom can you mean? Not your husband, surely!"

"Yes, whom else should I mean? Oh, Lina, I have borne much, and still live, but I can endure no more. If the cords of life do not snap under the pressure, I shall certainly go mad!"

"Where is he now?" asked Madeline in a subdued and tremulous tone. "He will not trouble you again, I hope."

"Perhaps not! He said he would not, but I can scarcely believe him. He will be coming back again soon. I expect it."

"What did he say? Did he urge anything in justification? Was he penitent?"

"*You* would have thought so, had you heard him. I did not. If he has any feeling left, he is now learning to understand what he made me suffer. He is receiving his reward."

"Why, how?" asked Lina, not comprehending her meaning.

"I refused to forgive him."

Madeline's face became very grave and sad.

"Oh, Mrs. Meredith, this is unlike you," she ventured. "Christ did not refuse it to the most guilty—will you be more severe than your Divine Master in your condemnation?"

"Lina, would you have me take him back again?"

"No, not if faith is shattered—love dead—as I believe them to be. But you can forgive him still."

"Yes, I do now. Then, over the grave of my child, and remembering all, I could not. Oh, I feel as if I should die with this weight upon my heart," she added, dropping wearily upon a sofa. "When shall I know rest?"

Madeline sat down by her, seeing her state of mind, and taking her hands in her own, drew from her a narrative of the scene in the Cemetery. It touched her to the heart. She could not blame Ora, but at the same time she pitied the man whose errors had wrecked the lives of both so sadly. She believed him to be sincere in his repentance.

"Perhaps," she thought hopefully, "all may yet be right."

Two or three days passed away, before Ora again ventured to the Cemetery. She feared to meet Mr. Piercelie, who, she could but believe, would seek her again. When she did go, it was early in the morning, and Lina accompanied her. The latter went to give some orders about Agnes Montes' grave, and

this was a good opportunity. She feared to let her go alone.

The gate was unlocked already, and they went in without ringing. The sexton was at the farthest side of the Cemetery from them, seemingly very busy, and they sent a boy who was playing about the cottage door, to say that they wanted to see him. Lina waited till he should receive the message, while Ora walked across to their lot.

A few moments later, a piercing scream rang out upon the air. Madeline turned her head just in time to see Ora throw up her hands and then fall to the ground upon her face. Terror for an instant deprived her of motion, but in a moment she recovered self-possession, and hastened to the spot, the sexton following her.

Ora lay as one dead, close to a strange form stretched out, face downward, upon the grave. It was a stranger, but instinct told her who he was—the unfortunate husband. A phial was lying empty close by, labelled laudanum, and the hand exposed to view had grasped a small slip of paper which must have slipped from his fingers and lay upon the ground just beneath. With a beating heart she stooped and picked it up, reading the lines traced there with tumultuous emotions of pain and pity:

“Nina, I cannot live without you, and have come here to die. Perhaps you will forgive me when you find how I have expiated my sin, and believe in my remorse. I implore you, let me be buried here with our child—it is all I ask.” Madeline let fall the paper trembling in every limb.

"Why, what is this?" said the sexton, now coming up. "I declare, it is the man who came here last night, and stone dead now!"

"Yes, quite dead," assented Madeline, bending down to touch the cold hand. "And she is nearly as lifeless—" now lifting Ora's head upon her lap, and beginning to chafe her hands. "Do get something quickly—some water."

"I will. Do not touch the dead body. No one must till the proper authorities are informed. I will be back in a minute."

He hastened away, and in a short time returned with water, which they dashed over her face till consciousness returned. But it was only for a moment, and then she sank down heavily, with a deep moan, and relapsed into insensibility.

"Oh, what shall I do?" exclaimed Madeline, seeing how hopelessly matters were becoming involved. "How shall I get assistance, and take her home?"

"We must get her to the cottage now, and send for a carriage afterward," replied the man, taking her up in his arms as he would a child. "Come, I will take her to the house, and my wife will help you."

As quickly as possible, Madeline despatched a hurried note to her father, bidding him hasten to her immediately. With all their efforts they failed to restore Ora again, and she became terrified with the thought of death. But it seemed an age after the messenger started before the Doctor arrived, and then with the first glance, the ominous expression of his face, seemed to confirm her fears.

"Papa," she whispered anxiously, "What is it? Is she in danger?"

Her father stood for a moment holding the wrist of the patient, and when he did speak, it was to ask:

"How did it happen! The messenger could give me no satisfaction, and your note explained nothing. How was she attacked?"

Madeline related briefly how she had preceded her, and how, being alarmed by her shriek, she had turned to see her fall, and on hastening to her, had found her as one dead beside the grave on which was stretched the lifeless form of the miserable suicide.

"Bad, bad! We must get her home, my daughter," said the Doctor, at the close. "The shock has completely prostrated her nervous system."

Reader, we pass rapidly over an interval of time it were painful to dwell upon. The inquest—the verdict of suicide—the burial of the penitent husband who had expiated his sin with his life. They laid him beside the little child, as he had plead to be laid there in his dying hour, and the green grass wrapped father and daughter in one common mantle of living beauty.

A year has passed away since the morning on which he was found dead, and the revolving wheel of Time has turned up to light new scenes, while the old ones slowly fade from the eye.

Harry Clifton is still in Europe, but he writes cheering letters that bring roses of happiness into the fair cheek of his gentle sister. He means to

come home soon, and bring a pretty little wife, of whom he speaks glowingly. He has not forgotten the old love, but he has considered it wisely, and mastered it, to give place to one more propitious of future happiness.

Amongst those of our friends whose interests have been linked with Ora's throughout this story, we find few changes. A new governess is in the old place at Dr. Clifton's, and the usual routine of life goes on steadily. Ora has been to her old home in the South, and has disposed of all the property once belonging to Edward Piercelie. It affords her all she wants for future comforts. No need now of labor and toil. Surrounded by her friends, she is resting—not in peace, but in patience. Remorse is in her heart, that she cannot stifle. The one hard, cruel act of her life she could not forget. She had denied a word of forgiveness to a suffering soul that had rashly sought its Creator with the heavy weight of sin upon it, and now she would give her existence, but for one moment of life, in which to set the longing spirit at rest.

But, too late now! she can only pray for pardon, and endure meekly her punishment.

Look once more upon her, reader, ere the curtain falls. She is sitting in the bay window at Dr. Clifton's, the light falling upon her pale, delicately chiseled features. Short rings of hair cluster all around her head, which has been shorn of its wealth of tresses, and gives her a much more girlish look than of old. She is still in the habiliments of deep mourning, and refuses to soften the solemn color by one tint of a

brighter hue, though Madeline has more than once ventured to urge it.

While she sits there, Theodore Raymond is announced, and enters as an old, familiar friend. She greets him with the calm, placid demeanor of a sister, and permits him to sit down by her, asking him questions about the family, as she quietly continues the employment that engages her. He does not seem to like it, and takes the light fabric from her hands.

"Please allow me to put this everlasting embroidery away. I want you to talk to me now. I have come for the answer to my suit. Tell me at once. Am I to go back now and come no more, or am I to hope to take you home and keep you forever?"

There is no flush upon her cheek—no change in the light of the blue eyes; and she speaks very slowly and sadly, looking in his face:

"Theodore, you know what my life has been and is. In the past, pain and misery beyond what most women experience—far. The future embittered by regrets that will never die. If you can be happy with me, thus overshadowed—with all the lightness and spirit of youth crushed out of my nature, and accept a saddened, prematurely old wife, I will not say nay, for you are dearer to me than all earth beside. But I tell you frankly my ability to make your life bright with strength and cheerfulness, has gone."

"No, dear Ora, you mistake. To me your very presence is sunshine, and I had rather have one of your sweet, quiet smiles, than all earth beside. Bless you, darling. I am at peace, now. I have waited long, Ora, but at last God vouchsafes me a reward that doubly compensates. Mine now—my own sweet wife—God willing, you shall know sorrow no more."



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